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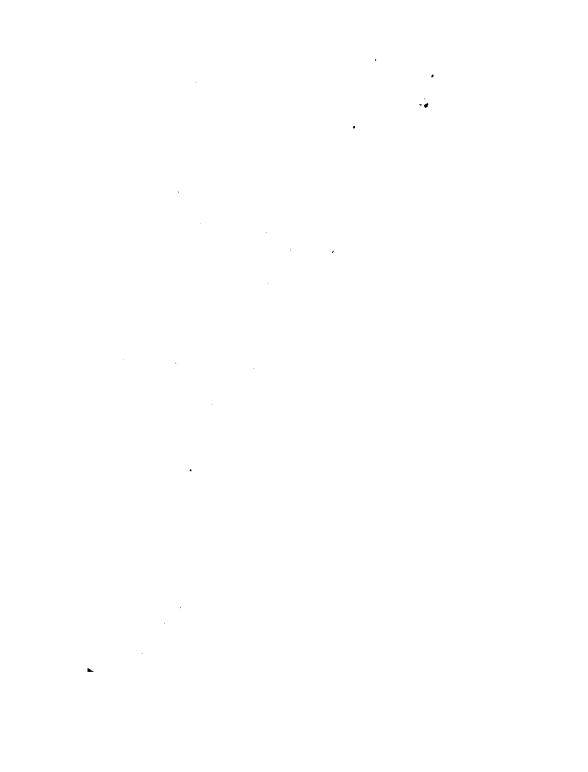
THE PROPHETOR PEACE

Rev. H.T. Howat



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ELISHA: THE PROPHET OF PEACE.

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BY THE

REV. H. T. HOWAT.

LIVERPOOL:

AUTHOR OF "ELIJAH, THE DESERT PROPHET," "SABBATH HOURS," "THE SPRING TIME OF LIFE," ETC.

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The Presbyterian Church of England,

QUEEN'S ROAD, LIVERPOOL,

TO WHOM IT HAS BEEN THE AUTHOR'S HONOUR AND HAPPINESS TO MINISTER FOR UPWARDS OF FOURTEEN YEARS,

THIS VOLUME,

CONSISTING OF SABBATH MORNING LECTURES, ORIGINALLY PREPARED FOR THEM. AND DELIVERED IN THEIR HEARING,

IS VERY AFFECTIONATELY AND GRATEFULLY INSCRIBED.



PREFACE.

THE present is intended to be a companion volume to one published by the same Author, ten years ago, and entitled "Elijah, the Desert Prophet." The object aimed at has also been similar—as stated in the preface to the previous work—viz., "to combine the latest results of Biblical interpretation and Eastern research with practical truth for every day life;" but how far this has been accomplished, must again be left for others to say.

In the preparation of this volume the Author has derived considerable assistance from his predecessors in the same field, as he has endeavoured to acknowledge in the proper place, but special and grateful mention deserves to be made of the thirty-first of Dean Stanley's Lectures on the History of the Jewish Church; Dr. Edersheim's Elisha the Prophet a Type of Christ; the volume entitled Scripture Characters by Dr. Andrew Thomson of Edinburgh; and Dr. J. R. MacDuff's Healing Waters of Israel. It is only

right that the Author should also acknowledge the invaluable help he has had in the revision of the proof-sheets, and in the remarks upon the Hebrew text from his son, the Rev. J. Robertson Howat, M.A.

In fine and in all humility, the Author commends his book to the blessing of Him who made the husbandman of Abel-Meholah the gentle, beneficent "holy man of God who passeth by us continually."

H. T. HOWAT.

Elmbank, Oakfield, Liverpool, August 25, 1878.

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INTRODUCTION.

CONTRAST BETWEEN ELIJAH AND ELISHA.

"Such was Elisha, greater yet less, less yet greater than Elijah. He is less. The man, the will, the personal grandeur of the Prophet are greater than any amount of prophetic acts or any extent of prophetic success. He is greater. The work of the great ones of this earth is carried on by far inferior instruments, but on a far wider scale, and it may be in a far higher spirit. What was begun in fire and storm, in solitude and awful visions, must be carried on through winning arts, and healing acts, and gentle words of peaceful and social intercourse—not in the desert of Horeb or on the top of Carmel, but in the crowded thoroughfares of Samaria, in the gardens of Damascus, by the rushing waters of Jordan."

DEAN STANLEY.



INTRODUCTION.

CONTRAST BETWEEN ELIJAH AND ELISHA.

2 Kings III. 11.

"Here is Elisha, the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah."

HE resemblances between Elijah and Elisha are occasionally so great, that it is scarcely surprising the one prophet is confused with the other. They both lived in one country and in one age. They were both the messengers of God to kings.

They both wrought miracles, and even the same class of miracles, multiplying the widow's oil and raising from the dead a mother's only child. Last of all, the life-work of both was to withstand and witness against idolatry, and restore the worship of the true God in the land of Israel.

And yet to the careful reader there is no contrast in the Bible more striking or complete. What John was to Peter, Mary to Martha, Melanchthon to Luther, that was Elisha the Prophet of Peace to Elijah the Desert Prophet— the

Prophet of Fire. The one is John the Baptist, the other is the gentler John—the Evangelist, the disciple of love who, leaning on his Master's bosom, caught and breathed In place of the long shaggy locks that a kindred spirit. had marked the awful Elijah, the head of the new and youthful prophet was shorn and smooth. Instead of the sheepskin mantle, he wore the attire of the period. hand he carried a walking staff. His whole gait was that of the ordinary citizen. Elisha was no lonely man dwelling in the grot of Cherith or the solitudes of the wilderness. He had his own house in Samaria. He was known in far Damascus. He was a frequent visitor to the sacred colleges in the beautiful woods that encompassed Jericho. And as for sixty long years he went up and down the land mingling freely with all classes of the people, the home of the Shunammite, we can believe, was only one of many, where bed and table, and "a prophet's chamber," were reserved with pious care for "the holy man of God" as he "passed by continually."

Indeed the whole contrast between Elijah and Elisha is so significant and instructive as to be well worth following from point to point.

First of all, therefore, Elijah simply drops upon the scene. There is no warning, no period of pupilage or preparation. Of his previous history nothing whatever is known. Like Melchisedec he has neither "beginning of days nor end of life." We meet Elisha, on the other hand,

for the first time in his father's fields, in "the meadow of the dance," at Abel-Meholah. Shaphat is a man of means, for he has twelve ploughs at work, a man of piety also, for he has refused to do homage at the shrine of Baal. In particular, he has trained his son to know Israel's God. Elijah meets the godly youth. He speaks not a word. He simply strips off his mantle, throws it over the shoulders of the wondering boy, claims him by the symbol as his spiritual son, and leaves him at the family feast to say farewell to his father and mother, and renounce an affluent calling for the higher but perilous and unremunerative office of servant and successor of a poor Prophet of God.

Secondly. During the whole of his public life—about twelve years at the most—Elijah to a large extent lived out of the world, or at least far above it, in stern sublimity. As he dropped upon the scene at the first, so during the greater part of his course he appears less like a living man than like an apparition. He flits hither and thither. He is seen now on the top of Carmel, and now in the vineyard of Naboth; now at the rock of Horeb, and now outstripping in their flight the royal horses, as on that night of the tempest he rushed through the gate of Jezreel. Elisha, on the other hand, is intimately mixed up with all the political movements and events of his day. Three kings seek him as their counsellor. Jehu is crowned at his bidding. Benhadad consults him in war. Joash attends at his deathbed. Whenever Elijah

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is seen in connection with kings and courts, it is always as their enemy—Ahab, Jezebel, Ahaziah. When Elisha is seen in the same connection, it is always as their friend— "My father, my father," is their uniform and reverent mode of address. Dr. John Henry Newman greatly perverts this fact when he makes use of it to show that Elisha was the type of that Holy Church Catholic to which in its dealings with men it is promised: "The nation and kingdom that will not serve Thee shall perish, yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted." "What have we here," says Dr. Newman, "but a figure of that church? Elisha be in spirit still among us, I mean, if the Church of Christ, viewed in her rulers, her confessors, her ascetics, and her doctors, be represented in the prophetic writings, such as Elisha is described in the history of Israel, how much have we to learn before we gain a clear and simple view of its real character? What a veil is on the eyes of men who treat it as a mere institution of this world. Surely we are under a supernatural dispensation, though we do not realise it." These words are quite in harmony with the sacerdotal pretension which, speaking of transubstantiation and the subjection of kings and rulers, has been known to say:

> "With my God in my hand, and my king at my knee, Who than I can greater be?"

Elisha, on the contrary, claimed no sovereignty over conscience, and when he spoke of subjection it was not to

himself but to the God of heaven. There is the widest possible difference between obedience to the revealed will of that God whose "commandments are not grievous," and are always consistent, and obedience to the edicts of a frail man who may proclaim Infallibility to-day and the Immaculate Conception to-morrow. The world, too, is becoming convinced of this, for among the dead and buried things of the past, which shall never know a resurrection is the temporal power of the Pope.

Thirdly. The miracles wrought by the two prophets form another interesting point of contrast between Elijah and Elisha. It is noticeable that Elisha wrought twice as many miracles as Elijah did, suggesting the inference that the parting request had been complied with to the letter: "And Elisha said, I pray thee let a double portion of Thy spirit be upon me." On his introduction to work, Elijah begins with a miracle—the emblem of so much of his future career—a miracle of judgment: "There shall not be dew nor rain these years," referring to the drought, "but according to My word." Elisha begins with a miracle—the emblem also of so much of his future career —but it is a miracle of mercy: "There shall not be from thence," speaking of the bitter waters of Jericho sweetened, "any more death or barren land." The miracles of Elisha, in fact, remind us very much of the miracles of Christ miracles of beneficence—all the more that, as in the case of our Lord, there are only two which seem to possess an

opposite character. Even these, however, are capable of explanation, as the cursing of the barren fig-tree, and the permission to the demons to enter the herd, are capable of explanation in the life of Jesus. The leprosy of Gehazi was the punishment of grievous sin; and, as we hope to show, the fate of the "children" of Bethel has been a good deal misunderstood. The very grave of Elisha wrought a miracle that reads very like a miracle of Christ, for "when the man was let down and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood up on his feet." It is perhaps natural and only what might be expected, that Dr. Newman again should employ this incident to justify the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on the sanctity and virtue of relics. Far finer and truer conceptions underlie the miracle. Might it not be the compensation to Elisha as compared with Elijah, that if he died, as Elijah was translated without tasting of death, he should be made the instrument even after death of giving life to a dead man—miraculous energy in the tomb, if not the miraculous departure by escaping it altogether? Nay, was there no foreshadowing here of Him who "through death" and after death "destroyed him that had the power of death" —the Prophet greater than Elisha, who was to go down to the grave, but only to lead captivity captive, and take from the spoiler his prey? The unique and solitary resurrection power of Elisha's tomb is too beautiful to be degraded by being pressed into the service of the adoration

of relics, such as the curious may see at Rome, Treves, or Aix-la-Chapelle. Say, rather, God was jealous for the honour of His servant, and let us in turn be jealous for the honour of that God who not only "keepeth the bones" of His saints, but when occasion serves can make these very bones "show wonders to the dead."

Fourthly. As another point in the contrast between Elijah and Elisha, it cannot be out of place to say that of Elisha like Joshua the son of Nun, not a single infirmity or failing is recorded. This cannot be said of Elijah, for he fled into the wilderness and lay down under the juniper tree to escape a woman's vengeance, and in despair to die. No doubt Elisha was only "a man of like passions" with ourselves; but judging by the evidence presented, he came nearer the standard of excellence than Elijah and was morally and spiritually the greater man. In grandeur and romance of character, all must admit, Elisha must stand behind Elijah, and be content to be known as the disciple and servant that "poured water on his hands." "Nations," says Dean Stanley, "churches, individuals, must all be content to feel as dwarfs in comparison with the giants of old times, with the Reformers, the Martyrs, the heroes of their early youthful reverence. Those who follow cannot be as those who went before. A prophet like Elijah comes once and does not return. Elisha both to his countrymen and to us is but the successor, the faint reflection of his predecessor." This is true, and yet it is only partial truth.

The humbler Elisha may do the greater work. every reason to believe that in reclaiming Israel from idolatry, by the conversion of individual men and women, "the still small voice" of Elisha, conjoined with his healing acts and social intercourse, accomplished wider and more permanent changes than the fire and storm and national upheaval caused by Elijah. Nor is this to be wondered at. The ministry of Elisha in Israel lasted nearly five times longer than the ministry of Elijah. The rough and pioneer work had already been done. "The power of Elias" had "prepared the way of the Lord." The soil had been turned up for the incorruptible seed. Then came the ministry of Elisha—the Old Testament type not only of Christ but of the New Testament minister, labouring for long years in crowded cities, amid the hum of busy populations, or away in quiet uplands, or lonely islands of the sea. Such men do good if not great work for God, ay, and when gathered to the grave their memories work miracles of grace, win victories for Christ, and become the traditions of generations. "The righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon." The figure is exact. The cedar is most useful when dead, most valued by man when the place that once knew it, knows it no more for ever. The firm grain of the cedar takes the finest polish. Ceiling the chamber it diffuses perpetual fragrance. No moth will corrupt the garment which the cedar protects. No worm will corrode its wood.

Well, therefore, may David say of the good man like Elisha: "He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon." The influence of a holy character and the memory of a godly life, belong to the imperishable.

Fifthly. This suggests the last point in the contrast I propose to institute between Elijah and Elisha—the translation of the one, the ordinary death by dissolution of the other. For Elijah there came down the burning equipage, swift as the lightning, more vivid than any flash—a chariot of fire with horses of fire, and there as the tempest weaves itself around the aged prophet, Elijah goes up "by a whirlwind into heaven."

"On the arch of the rainbow the chariot is gliding, Through the path of the thunder the horsemen are riding: Glide swiftly, bright spirit, the prize is before ye, A crown never fading, a kingdom of glory."

The picture of Elisha, on the other hand, is that of an old emaciated man, the earthly house of whose tabernacle has to be taken down by long and wearing sickness, before he can pass up into the heavenly places. In the case of Elijah, there is a suspension of all the ordinary laws of nature: "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," the servant is with his Lord. Elisha, however, must suffer—his is to be the hard and weary lot that must patiently await the end. How does this fit in with our preconceptions? If there was to be distinction of honours at all between the two prophets, should the chariot of fire and the horses of fire not have been reserved for Elisha—the prophet of the

blameless ministry of sixty years, and might not Elijah after his weakness in fleeing to the wilderness and distrust and despair of God, have been thankful to be taken to heaven in any form? Registering the actions of the two prophets and what they did for God, should we not rather read—"the translation of Elisha, the dissolution of Elijah?" Or shall we say that Elisha was less prepared for the close of life than Elijah, less approved of God, less fit to meet Him, less ready for heaven, and that on this account he was subjected to a protracted and mysterious discipline which the other did not require? What is meant by being ready to die? I trust that if we are God's children we are fit to die—through His grace who alone can give the fitness—before we lay our heads upon a dying pillow. I do not deny that a lengthened illness rightly improved may make even the best man better, but I do not dwell with pleasure upon the thought that our Father whose name is Love, can so deal with any of His children as not to permit the soul to leave the body, till a certain point of purification has been reached, which being attained the end comes. I wish to speak humbly, reverently, and not "rush in where angels fear to tread." But such a view of the discipline of God with His children, seems to me too much in the line of the Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory, with this difference, as Henry Melvill expresses it—the Protestant puts it before death and the Romanist after. Some of the godliest men and women I ever knew

in this world, I have known on sickbeds, and I had every reason to believe they were prepared, through Christ, for the presence of God, the first year I knew them as ten years after. Was the lesson, therefore, of the long lingering years of suffering to be this—that they were not ready for the great change, that corruption had such a hold upon them it had to be driven out piecemeal, that their sinfulness was so deep-seated it could only be eradicated by extraordinary means—in one word, that these suffering saints would never have gone to heaven without the suffering? I do not believe in any such doctrine. It is harsh, uncharitable, and very unlike Christ. I can read many lessons in these sick chambers where the Elishas are laid low, but they are lessons quite as much for the spectators as for the sufferers. Many an aged minister has preached nobler sermons from his sickbed patiently borne than ever he preached from his pulpit in his youngest and palmiest days. Many a bed-ridden Christian and wornout invalid, like the sister of Dr. Arnold, of Rugby—as her brother has so touchingly told—has spoken to a whole neighbourhood and even a whole town, and left impressions of childlike submission, and the magnifying of God in the darkest hours, which have won hundreds to the feet of Christ. Is Elisha, therefore, laid on his sickbed, while Elijah has his chariot of fire? Let the lessons be—how the Gospel can be published and adorned in the least likely situations, how the suffering Christian,

in place of being useless or laid by, is rather occupying one of the high places of the field, and how in a religion that sustains the timid, and makes the fretful resigned, and conquers even the grave, the world sees and reads reality—the Christianity which is Christ reflected in the lives and in the deaths of Christ-like men.

In conclusion, the whole career of Elisha supplies us with some serious and useful practical lessons. His special feature of character was this—holiness. He was "a holy man of God." What a sublimity there is in this simple language! What honour or title is ever to be compared with it? Abraham was "the Friend of God," David was "the man after God's own heart," Daniel was "the man greatly beloved," Elisha is "the man of God." All social distinctions that count so much with men sink here into insignificance. Wealth cannot take the place of holiness, nor learning, nor accomplishments, nor all the honours of earth put together. In the eyes of a holy God, if we are not "holy" we are nothing. What Paul describes as "the image of God" in us God's creatures, is not His eternity, nor His power, nor His omniscience, nor His mercy, nor even His love, it is His "holiness." Holiness of nature, therefore—to be "holy" men and women—this is to be our first, our chief, our highest object of pursuit. Whatever else we are honourably known to be, let us seek to "be holy even as God is holy." "Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee." Amen.

LECTURE I.

THE BITTER WATERS SWEETENED-ELISHA THE HEALER.

"Whatever else may be taken away from us by rational criticism, Christ is still left, a unique figure. Who among His disciples or among their proselytes, was capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Jesus or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels?

. . . Nor even now would it be easy even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete, than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve his life."

JOHN STUART MILL.

LECTURE I.

THE BITTER WATERS SWEETENED—ELISHA THE HEALER.

II. Kings II. 18-22.

"He tarried at Jericho. . . . And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant as my Lord seeth, but the water is naught, and the ground barren."

ERICHO, a city of high antiquity, was one of the most important in the land of Palestine. Its walls were so broad, that at least one person—Rahab—had her house upon them. Silver and gold were so abundant that one

man—Achan—could stealthily appropriate 200 shekels. Between the city and the far East, there had existed for years, before its occupation by the children of Israel, a wide and extensive commerce, of which the "goodly Babylonish garment," purloined in the act of dishonesty just mentioned, may be accepted as proof. The brass foundries of Jericho, as we learn from the second book of Chronicles, were taken advantage of by

Solomon in the building of the Temple. Its situation—in a noble plain and close to the river which was the pride of Palestine—earned for Jericho the title of "The City of the Palm Trees." In later years it was the site of a sacred college, where "the sons of the prophets" were trained for their work as Ambassadors for God.

The New Testament notices of Jericho are full of interest. The lonely limestone rocks behind the city formed the scene of our Lord's temptation. It was down the banks of the Jordan, at Jericho, the Master had previously gone to be baptized. Three times in Jericho did Our Blessed Lord give sight to the blind. Once in Jericho, the descendant of Rahab the "hostess" accepted the hospitality of Zaccheus the publican. Last of all, between Jerusalem and Jericho, and along the precipitous road of which in all ages brigands have been the terror, was laid the scene of the story of the good Samaritan.

For 550 years a doom had lain upon Jericho. She had been the first city to resist the advance of Israel under the leadership of Joshua. She was therefore not only condemned to fall "before the Captain of the Lord's host," and amid the much ceremony with which we are all familiar—the annihilation was accompanied with a terrible curse. The man who ventured to rebuild Jericho was to lay the foundation in his first-born, and in his youngest son to set up the gates. The words were

literally fulfilled. In the worst days of Ahab, thirtythree years before the period of the text, Hiel the Bethelite rebuilt Jericho: "He laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his first-born, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun."

From the days of Joshua, therefore, to the days of Hiel the Bethelite, a period of 520 years, the site of Jericho had been uninhabited, and the whole of the noble region, with its many natural advantages of springs of water-so dear to the people of the East, and on which their life depends—shared in the judgment pronounced against him who sought to restore what God had destroyed. Those who have visited Jericho tell us of the waters of this passage—rising at the base of the limestone rocks of which I have spoken, as forming the scene of Our Lord's temptation. Sending their streams across the plain towards the Jordan, they scatter even at the hottest season of the year, the richest and most grateful vegetation over what would otherwise be a bare tract of sandy soil. Josephus describes the district in his day as quite a fairy-land, with its palms and roses, and fragrant balsams and thickly-dotted pleasure grounds — a perfect garden and paradise of Eastern beauty. Those also who are familiar with the writings of Sir Walter Scott, will remember that the very spring of this passage is described with much beauty in the opening chapters of the *Talisman*, under the highly-poetical name of "The Diamond of the Desert."

"The travellers," says Scott, "had now arrived at the knot of palm-trees and the fountain which welled out from beneath their shade in sparkling profusion. It was a scene which perhaps elsewhere would have deserved little notice; but as a single speck in the boundless horizon, which promised the refreshment of shade and living water—these blessings held cheap where they are common, rendered the fountain and its neighbourhood a little paradise. Some generous or charitable hand, ere yet the evil days of Palestine began, had walled in and arched over the fountain, excluding the sun in a great measure from its waters, which hardly touched by a straggling beam, while all around was blazing under the scorching heat, lay in a steady repose alike delightful to the eye and the imagination. The scarce visible current, which escaped from the marble basin into which it stole from under the arch, served to nourish the palmtrees that surrounded the fountain, and where it sank into the ground and disappeared, its refreshing presence was acknowledged by a carpet of velvet verdure."

At the period of the text, however, things were very different. The spring was still suffering from the old doom pronounced against Jericho, it was noxious, unfit for drinking, prejudicial to the soil: "The men of the city said unto Elisha"—who was at this time residing

here in the sacred college—"Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my Lord seeth, but the water is naught, and the ground barren."

The words are capable of many historical, and especially spiritual, applications. Of republican Athens, of imperial Rome, it might well be said "the city was In both there was learning, genius, high pleasant." civilisation, the cultivation of the fine arts to an extent that has made the Elgin marbles, for example, the wonder of the world. But "the water was naught, and the ground was barren," because there was the absence of true religion. No country whatever can in the highest sense prosper without it. The oldest civilisation in the world perhaps is that of China, and yet destitute of Christianity, it is only barbarism covered by a thin veneer of refinement. Plato was far greater than Confucius, and yet even Plato's ideal of a perfect man reached no higher than a well-trained body and a wellfurnished intellect. What marvel then, that even Greece in its palmiest days felt the aching void, and that such a sage as Socrates saw the absolute necessity for a Divine interposition, if things were ever to be better?

On being appealed to by the men of Jeriche, who must therefore have been aware of the presence in their midst of a prophet of God—teaching us the useful lesson of being careful to discern our privileges—Elisha resolved to interfere on their behalf in the name of the Master

whose commission he bore. His action was essentially symbolic. "Bring me," he said, "a new cruse." It was a startling novelty he proposed. "Put salt therein," he added. Salt was a strange thing to improve the quality of the water, but it was part of the symbol, and certainly showed, as we shall see immediately, that Elisha was only an instrument, and that if the bitter waters were to be sweetened, it could only be by the healing power of God. Then the prophet, remark, went to "the spring of the waters and cast the salt in there"—the fountain head—in order that the new character given to the waters might flow or filter from top to bottom, and the change become thorough and throughout.

Some excellent spiritual lessons are to be gathered here.

The Gospel is "a new cruse" for the world. Christianity comes not in "the oldness of the letter" and the law, but in "the newness of the Spirit." "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor. . . . And he closed the book . . . and began to say unto them, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears."

The Gospel, too, begins at the origin of the evil—the heart—that is "the spring of the waters." What is needed is "a clean heart and a right spirit;" the poison is at the fountain head and must be dealt with there.

Once again, like the salt in the cruse, how unlikely and insufficient at first sight the simple Gospel appears for the world's conversion: the treasure in the earthen vessel: "only believe," that is all, that is easy—so little, so easy, that an intellectual world rejects the Gospel from the very fact of its giving them nothing whatever to do in the matter of the merit of their own salvation.

I do not know that the simplicity of the Gospel Fountain,—and, in particular, the grand difference and distinction between the Old Testament and the New in the matter of man's salvation,—could be better illustrated than by a figure suggested by the very waters of this passage, and of which the Rev. William Arnot has made a characteristic use, in his "Anchor of the Soul."

In the latter days of Jerusalem, at the Feast of Tabernacles, and on the last day of the Feast, at evening, the priests, to commemorate the striking of the rock in Horeb, formed a procession, and drawing water from the Pool of Siloam, bore it to the Temple, and poured it on the ground in such quantity that it flowed down to all the lower streets of the city. It was a ceremony borrowed in all probability from Ezekiel's "vision of waters" issuing from the same Temple, small but gradually increasing, till they became "a river that could not be passed over"—" a river to swim in." One evening in these latter days of Jerusalem, the priests were returning

from the Pool of Siloam to the Temple. The water was being poured from the golden pitchers. It was finding its way across the Temple courts and along the water channels, to the different parts of the city. The beams of the setting sun are striking it, and a sheen of silvery light is reflected from the bosom of the "mimic stream." That moment a Voice arrests the attention of the wondering multitudes and promises better things than trickling water—even water that could quench the thirst of souls, and which centuries before, at the spring of Jericho sweetened, Elisha the Healer had symbolised: "In the last day, that great day of the Feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto ME and drink."

The words with which Elisha accompanied the casting in of the salt, and the consequent working of the miracle, are very noticeable: "Thus saith the Lord," exclaimed the prophet, "I have healed these waters." How the change was effected, we cannot tell. As the unwhole-some ingredient—to speak for a moment of secondary causes—must have been contracted by the waters passing through some beds of rock or earth that furnished it, so, by turning these subterraneous currents in another direction, the unwholesome ingredient may have been avoided and the waters of the spring purged. This is one perfectly conceivable way of effecting the change. No doubt at the first it must have required

miraculous interposition; but afterwards everything may have proceeded in perfect harmony with natural law. After all, however, we are not bound to account for the special way in which the miracle was wrought. case before us is precisely the same as that of Elijah and "I have commanded," said God, "the the ravens. ravens to feed thee." So in the passage before us: "Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters." Admit the possibility, the reality of the miracle, and all is plain. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" But remember, it was the Lord's hand, not Elisha's. The prophet disclaimed all power personal or peculiar to himself in the matter. The word and the power went together. "Thus saith the Lord," said Elisha, "I have healed these waters:" "so the waters were healed," The result was immediate. Means were employed to show that God in His greatest works has a place for the instrumentality of man. Elisha "cast in" the salt.

Some excellent Gospel lessons are taught us here. In the redemption of a lost world, God has room for the energies of believing men. "As ye go, preach." "Sow beside all waters." "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as those who must give an account." "He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

God also has promised to accompany the word of the Gospel faithfully proclaimed with His own saving Power. Cast in the salt; every spring will not remain bitter. The Gospel salt, like the Gospel leaven, can do its own work. Cast it in; there will be healing by and by: "let patience have her perfect work;" add to faith patience; sooner or later over converted souls the "Thus saith the Lord" will be heard: "I have healed them."

But God is the grand Agent. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but with the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost" this is the Divine method of salvation. The power of the healing waters comes from the Great Physician. "The new cruse" and "the salt" in it, both are God's sufficient honour for poor sinful men to be their administrators—let God be "All in All." Thus easy it is, without fancy or straining, to find the simple Gospel in the waters of Jericho—the Gospel "salt" for the poisoned spring, "the river of the water of life," "if any man thirst." Remark these words. Here is the spring What about the desire to drink from it? healed. have read of an invalid who was sent to a milder climate. Writing back to friends at home, she described with much interest the beauty of the place, the landscape, the blue waves of the Mediterranean, but there was this **Ence:** "I have no appetite; if the appetite would

only return, I would be well." That was the root of the malady now— no appetite—and so when spring began to follow winter, she died—died, too, from want not of food, but want of hunger. Are there none to-day like her, the wells of salvation flooding the land, and yet they have no thirst, no appetite: "if the appetite would only come, it would be well."

I cannot create the water: I cannot create the thirst: but God who has provided the one, is willing to help us "with all might by His Spirit in the inner man," when He sees the faintest longing after the other. Thirst, then, for God, for the Living God. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

There was no mistaking the result of the Divine interposition by the hand of Elisha in relation to the bitter waters of Jericho. "Thus saith the Lord, there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land." The prophecy, as we saw in the outset of this lecture, has been faithfully realised. Down to the present hour all travellers to Palestine—Robinson, Dean Stanley, Professor Porter—speak in glowing terms of the cool, sweet, and pleasant waters of the Fountain of Elisha. The soil around is extensively cultivated. Sugar-yielding canes are plentiful. Fig-trees abound on all sides. Wild flowers of the brightest hues bespangle the meadowlands; and honey is largely found in the nest of the wild

bee. The blight, here described as "death," has been removed. The vale of Jericho is "barren" no more. "Almost every reed in these regions," writes one traveller, "distils a rich juice, almost every herb breathes fragrance."

The figure is that of the Gospel again, both in its influence on society at large and the individual believing heart. Put "the new cruse" and "the salt" once really in, and a new heart leads to a new life, and the world at large, once its springs are really touched, feels it through all its tributaries and ramifications.

What has Christianity not done for the social life of man? It has abolished polygamy. It has put honour on the marriage tie. It has created lazar-houses for the sick, and asylums for the penitent profligate. What has it not done for the cause of civil liberty? It has struck the fetters from the negro. It has proclaimed freedom of conscience. It aroused Europe in the sixteenth century from the sleep of ages, as to-day it is leavening India and Japan. What has the Gospel not done in the department of letters? The best answer, perhaps, would be, "The Blank Bible," in "The Eclipse of Faith." Remove the Bible from modern literature. and where are the finest passages of Shakespeare, the entire conception of "Paradise Lost," the "Pilgrim's Progress," the "In Memoriam" of Tennyson, and "The Cottar's Saturday Night" of Burns? Nay, the very

standard of the English tongue is the language of the Saxon Bible, that lives upon the ear like music that cannot be forgotten. What has Christianity not done Compare Protestant countries with the for Science? lands of the Moslem, and you have the reply. Our very mission stations are becoming scientific observatories; and the platform of our British Association, and even the freedom possessed by our scientists to utter opinions opposed to the Gospel—have been won for them by the candour of Christian men. "Prove all things, hold fast that which is good." The Author of the Word and the Author of the world, is one. What has Christianity not done for the commercial enterprise and the outward prosperity of the world? The missionary is the pioneer of the merchant. Ever since the hour when the Apostle Paul stepped on board a corn-ship to go from Malta to Puteoli, the Gospel has been the friend of commerce, and to-day for every sovereign Great Britain expends in missions she receives ten in trade. But on far higher ground, what was the testimony of the Indian Government in the Report laid before the House of Commons in 1873? It was this: "The Government of India cannot but acknowledge the great obligation under which it is laid by the benevolent exertions of the 600 missionaries here settled, whose blameless example and self-denying labours are infusing new vigour into the stereotyped life of the great populations, and are preparing them to be in every way better men and better citizens of the great empire in which they dwell."

Coming home to our own country, who can doubt the wide-spread increase of Christian influence in public and social life amongst ourselves? It was the Christianity of this country that put down the slave trade, that abolished the corn laws, that has led to the formation of the many noble schemes of peace, social amelioration, and reform with which we are familiar at the present moment. We have to thank our Christianity — this steady and wide-spread increase of Christian influence for the fact that the novelist who would dare to write in the style of Fielding and Smollett would be driven from the ranks of letters. Our statesmen feel its power in the high places of the land. The late Lord Derby was the author of an "Exposition of the Parables" written by him for his children—which did as much credit to his heart as his fine translation of Homer to his famous classical power. Earl Russell, in his palmiest days, spent many a quiet hour as a Scripturereader among the poor of Richmond. Whatever may be thought of his "Chapter of Autobiography" and the political changes through which Mr. Gladstone has passed, in one thing he has never changed—his simple faith in Christianity, and his earnest, high-principled, unhalting Christian life. The most consistent statesman living, the great Tribune of the people, John

Bright, is as beautiful an expounder of the Word of God at a little Friends' meeting, as he is universally acknowledged to be the first orator in the British Parliament. Nor can we be sufficiently thankful that "the throne" of these realms for forty years has been so thoroughly "established in righteousness," and that all around and beneath our pious Queen have been made to understand that, wearing herself "the white flower of a blameless life," nothing but purity and "truth in the inward parts" would ever be permitted where she held Court.

Do I mean to convey the idea that we are a perfect people, that there are no "bitter waters" among us still, that "Elisha the Healer" is not needed now? I have no such thought. The simple fact that during the past year-1875-no fewer than 7000 women were conveyed to the jail of this town-only 990 of them for the first time, and some of them from 20 to 50 times—reveals a social condition which demands more than ever "the salt" and "the new cruse," and may well lead us all, to try to save the young at least, from following in their mothers' footsteps, if the old baffle us so often, in all our efforts at their reclamation. It could be no pleasure, and indeed no news, to put my finger on the other blots upon our social life—the state of education among the masses after 50 years of agitation—the dens of iniquity in all our large towns (and our own I believe not the worst, although we are held up every now and again as "the easiest place to go to destruction in"—) the temptations to dishonesty, and the strangling of all honourable industry presented by betting - excess in drink, ruining so many of our best young men by the fatal habit of tippling during business hours—the public profligacy and (I am told) the private profligacy that exists in quarters the last to be suspected, as if God and eternity were a fable, and "man's chief end" no longer "to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever," but to indulge his worst passions at whatever cost. I fear we need "Elisha the Healer" yet. The "waters" are "bitter, bitter" still in many quarters, and nothing but the "salt" and "the new cruse" can ever work the change.

Let us be faithful. Let ministers be faithful. God knows we have many temptations to be "dumb dogs" and "prophesy smooth things." Let fathers and mothers be faithful, that parental authority may have the ordering of the hours at night, and the companionships to be chosen by sons and daughters. Let children be faithful. "Honour thy father and thy mother" is not yet out of date, and the boy that will scoff at the mother that bore him, has taken the first step to ruin. There is not a man or woman among us who is not called to be faithful—not one of us who cannot do something, as instruments in God's hand, with "the salt" and "the

new cruse." Employers and servants, mistresses and domestics, young men with one another, ay, "lover and friend"—if we each do the part that lies beside ourselves, we can do much to sweeten the waters by the blessing of God.

But never let our own eternal interests be forgotten, especially in relation to the quenching of the thirst of the soul by the living water which Christ still "stands" Does the Word of God say and "cries" to offer. "cries"—" stands" and "cries" to offer? last day, the great day of the feast," did Jesus "stand" and "CRY" aloud His offer? He did, He does still. Is this the world's way? Alas! no. Those usually "cry" who are ready to perish; that strong swimmer breasting the waves to save the child is calm and silent. Here in the soul's salvation, however, it is Christ who "cries;" it is the sinner to be saved who alone is dumb. Jerusalem had its eyes dry, when "He beheld the city and wept over it." Preserve us, O Lord, from the silence that means death, from the stoicism that means destruction, from the hardness of heart that will continue to resist Thee, and give us all more and more of "the salt" and the "new cruse" that bring eternal life.

Oh! Christ He is the fountain,
The deep, sweet well of love!
The streams on earth I've tasted,
More deep I'll drink above.

There to an ocean fulness
His mercy doth expand,
And glory—glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land.

There the red Rose of Sharon
Unfolds its heartmost bloom
And fills the air of heaven,
With ravishing perfume.
Oh! to behold it blossom
While by its fragrance fanned,
Where glory—glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land.

I've wrestled on towards heaven,
'Gainst storm and wind and tide;
Now like a weary traveller,
That leaneth on his guide,
Amid the shades of evening,
While sinks life's lingering sand,
I hail the glory—dawning
From Immanuel's land.

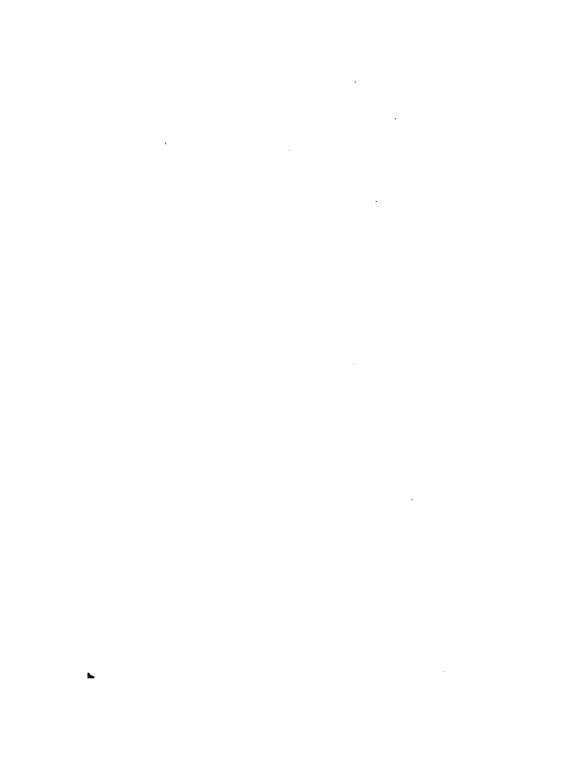
Amen.

LECTURE II.

THE YOUNG MEN OF BETHEL—ELISHA THE VINDICATED OF GOD.

"I take this story as teaching us what I think we very much need to be taught, namely, that the faults of our youth, and those which are most natural to us at that age, are not considered by God as trifling. That to Him is important, and that He wills His creatures to regard as important, which is an offence against His laws, a departure from His likeness. . . You may hear grown-up people talk in a laughing manner of the faults which they committed at school, of their idleness and their various acts of mischief, and worse than mischief. And when boys hear this, it naturally makes them think it really does not matter much whether they behave well or ill, they are just as likely to be respectable and amiable men hereafter. I would beg those who think so to attend a little to the story in the text."

DR. ARNOLD'S SERMONS TO THE BOYS AT RUGBY.



LECTURE II.

THE YOUNG MEN OF BETHEL—ELISHA THE VINDICATED OF GOD.

II. KINGS II. 23-25.

"And he went up from thence unto Bethel, and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city and mocked him," &c.

HAT the passage before us is surrounded with difficulties, arising from the apparent disproportion of the punishment to the offence and its resemblance to nothing else in the whole of the gentle and beneficent life of Elisha,

will be admitted by every careful reader. The difficulties of the passage, however, have been needlessly increased by a most unfortunate mis-translation. The original Hebrew word here rendered "children" really means "young men." It is the same word which in other portions of the Old Testament is applied to Isaac on Mount Moriah, to Joseph when he was seventeen years of age, to Solomon when he was twenty, and to the prophet Jeremiah at the period

when he was called upon to assume the sacred office. "Children" it cannot mean in the ordinary sense, and far less "little children." In addition, there is sufficient in the narrative itself to show that such "little children" could never have been guilty of the offence committed. insult to Elisha was based upon the ascension of Elijah, and it is incredible that mere children of a year or two old, could have known so much about the relation of the two prophets to each other, as to make the rapture of Elijah the groundwork of the studied and elaborate indignity, offered not merely to Elisha but to Elisha's God, as recorded in the present chapter. Besides, admitting that the "little children" could have shown such extraordinary precocity, is it conceivable, and can we harmonize it with all our views of God, that for such a childish freak the Father of eternal love could have brought two fierce animals out of the forests of Bethel, to devour on the spot (as the general interpretation of the passage is) two-and-forty children?—a thing in itself impossible. I do not and cannot believe this, and I am thankful that there are such unanswerable reasons for concluding that this never was the meaning of the Spirit of God in the preservation of this narrative.*

^{*} It is certainly surprising to see so broad a man as the Rev. Samuel Cox clinging in the *Expositor*, Vol. iii., page 414, to the translation "little children," and writing thus: "Dying, they passed through a brief agony from the base and degrading influence of idolatrous homes,

Starting then with the clear and undoubted fact that the allusion is not to "children" at all, what does the passage mean?

One of the most sacred spots in Palestine was Bethel. From the night that Jacob lay there with a stone for his pillow, and saw in his dream the steps of the rocky terraces forming themselves into a ladder between earth and heaven, Bethel had been a consecrated shrine, "the House of God." Indeed, in all languages since, and in spite of the utmost diversities of religious belief, the Hebrew word has been adopted to denote a temple of worship, from the Chief Sanctuary of the Mohammedan world at Mecca, down to the humblest meeting house of the humblest sect in Protestant Christendom, which desires no higher name for its church, than that it should be—a Bethel. When Jeroboam ascended the throne of Israel, he was daring enough to select Bethel as one of the two great seats and depositories of the new false worship. At Bethel, where Jacob had enjoyed such high communion with the one only living and true God, where in later days the ark of the covenant had been placed, with the altar of burnt-offering and peace-offering committed to the charge of Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron,—Jeroboam set up one of the two to the pure and kindly nurture of the home in the heavens. Was there no mercy also for their guilty parents? Punished in their children, their punishment became a call to repentance." Keil and Lange shew conclusively that the words mean "young men," the former translating them "certain loose fellows,"

calves of gold. Here, too, he built the House of High Places for Baal, venturing even as far as an altar of incense, at which he stood himself and offered strange fire before the Lord. The old representative city of the pure and divine religion of the Jews, became, along with Dan at the northern extremity, the representative city of heathen idolatry in the land that was promised to Abraham. Bethel—to quote the language of the prophet Hosea—the house of God—became now "Beth-aven"*—the house of the idol. The idolatrous priests who were fed at the royal table in the days of Ahab and who swarmed all over the land like spiritual banditti, found Bethel with its traditions a congenial spot, and did their utmost to trade on its old reputation in establishing the worship of Baal.

It must now be remembered that during the revolution created by the life-work of Elijah, a sacred college had been established at Bethel, in the interests of the reformed faith. Following in the footsteps of his predecessor, Elisha encouraged it. It was not to be expected, however, that the priests of Baal could have any sympathy with such a work of God. Accordingly they took every opportunity of shewing it opposition. There can be little doubt it was the priesthood of Bethel who were at the bottom of the incident brought before us in the text. They enlisted a body of foolish young men, probably some of their own disciples, in the school of the false prophets.

They incited them to go out and meet the new prophet of Jehovah. As compared with Elijah, he had certain bodily peculiarities, which in Eastern countries, in the days of the text, were reckoned a reproach. The well-shorn head of Elisha, for example, as contrasted with the long shaggy locks of Elijah, afforded an excellent beginning for the ridicule. The ascension of Elijah would strengthen it and keep it up.

The prophet has left Jericho, where he had made the bitter waters sweet. He is ascending the rocky terraces of the hill country of Bethel. He is met by the mocking group. The prophet is in the centre of the "Bald Head," they cry, "go forty-two young men. up, go up." "What doest thou here, Elisha?"-for this is the spirit and meaning of the words—"why be left behind by Elijah? Call for the fiery chariot and the steeds of flame, and ascend through the yielding air to the loftier seat and serener joys that belong to men like you." Now, this was mockery of Elisha, nay, mockery I have said, of Elisha's God, and mockery of the miracle so recent, by which the God of Israel had awed the land-deliberate profanity and impiety, and on the last spot in Palestine where such was to be expected, at Bethel, "the House of God and the gate of Heaven." That moment, even the gentle Elisha turned in holy indignation. He looked on the rash and scornful band. Not in his own name—not in a fit of mere personal irritation, or from any impulse of mere individual vindictive resentment, but as the minister of God, and in God's dishonoured name, he "cursed" them. A sickening judgment followed, and the saddest heart that night in Bethel was that of the lonely man who went away to Carmel, with the blood of blaspheming young men dyeing the white cliffs where Jacob found his pillow.

But still the question arises—even admitting that the offence was not committed by little children but by young men—does not the punishment seem greatly disproportioned to the offence? Are we to understand that the God of Israel brought two fierce animals out of the forests of Bethel—where, or at least a little further north in Palestine, they are still to be found—there and then to put to death forty-two Hebrew youths? My answer is, first, God is a jealous God, and this is by no means the severest illustration given us in the Bible that He cannot be trifled with. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked."

But secondly, the passage does not say the young men were destroyed. The expression is "tare"—an interpretation therefore to the effect that the punishment partook more of a solemn warning to the young men than a wholesale massacre, or at least that it was of a more general character than we have been in the habit of supposing, will satisfy the original Hebrew word,* and fit in better both with the

^{*} Calmet, for example, suggests that they might have been wounded and yet have survived, and the text nowhere says that they died. For a short critical discussion of the words of the passage, see large note trage 51.

rest of Elisha's life and the character of that Father God to whom judgment is His "strange work," and who in the midst of wrath "remembers mercy." From the brevity and disconnectedness of the narrative, many questions arise, which must remain unanswered, but for my own part I certainly incline to the more humane interpretation. Nor is this a "rationalising" of the passage, but an endeavour to expound a very difficult portion of Scripture in a way that will disarm the adversary. Half-educated sceptics, like Paine in his "Age of Reason," have grown terribly indignant over these verses, and so transcendent a genius as Goethe could permit himself to say that a passage like this, especially as it stands in our English version, was "very like the God of the Old Testament." Now, I believe that great dishonour has often been done to the character of God in past days both as our Father and as a God of infinite compassion, not only by unfortunate mis-translations, but by still more unfortunate mis-interpretations. notorious instance of this is the story in the life of David about the capture of Rabbah and the conquest of the Ammonites, where we read that David "brought forth the people and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brickkiln,"-conveying as the passage stands the idea of incredible tortures—when the simple meaning is that he compelled them to work, probably enough as slaves in hewing wood as sawyers, as miners, making bricks for

furnaces, and similar occupations—a very different thing, however, from the horrible barbarities the words have been made to imply. So in the text. I feel relieved that there is a reasonable explanation, and any honest attempt to show that the passage can be expounded, in a way to vindicate the justice of God and the office of His Prophet, without bringing in the element of cruelties, from which all must shrink, may at least be listened to if not treated with respect. I do not believe in a God who is all mercy, without any side of justice or judgment; but I do believe in a God who even under the Old Testament has told us He is "slow to anger and plenteous in mercy"—who "hath not dealt" with any of us "after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities."

Having thus given what I believe to be the true meaning of the passage, let us now look at it in one or two side-lights. First of all, the passage suggests the enquiry if any of us is making Bethel the House of God, Beth-aven the House of the idol. What I mean is, are we holding fast to the purity and simplicity of religion? We live in trying, testing, tempting times. And there are two extremes. The first is that represented by some popular novelists, who seem to take quite a wicked delight in painting religious people as pure hypocrites. The second is that represented by another school, who believe in an easy respectable kind of religion that does not press the conscience very hard, that does not make too many demands on consistency and

spirituality, and that leaves a pretty wide margin for tolerance of the world, the flesh, and the devil. The popular novelist goes to the one extreme of judging all religious people by the pretentious piety, the spiritual self-conceit, and the narrow-minded bigotry that says, "Stand by, for I am holier than thou," and which does a world of mischief from its complete forgetfulness of the great Gospel of Charity. The easy-going religionist is found at the other extreme, for whether or no compromise is the genius of legislation, there can be no compromise in the obedience of God: "No man can serve two masters," "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." Between the two extremes let us find an intelligent and an intelligible Christianity, built upon the finished work of Christ, and sanctified by the Word of God and prayer. The truest Christians are the least pretentious, ay, and they are the broadest, like their Master, who had pardon for the woman that was a sinner. The truest Christians also will be the first to confess that they never found the Gospel an austere task, but rather like their Master again, in His very first and representative miracle, that it gave a new relish to every real pleasure, and changed the water of earth into the wine of heaven. "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart" —"in keeping of them there is great reward." us hold fast a simple and a pure religion. Anything else—especially when degrading the worship of God by gaudy and symbolic ritual-is only changing Bethel, the House of God, into idolatrous Bethaven, the House of Delusion.

The passage suggests again the danger of levity in sacred things. No really earnest man will ever be guilty of this. Had there been any among those forty-two young men at Bethel, who were even in a state of doubt or suspense about the old religion of Jehovah, be sure he would never have been a mocker. The true enquirer never mocks. Nay, I will venture to add that the honest doubter never doubts the reality of any of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, but he does it in a spirit of the deepest sadness. The noblest pervert the Church of Rome has gained in this country is John Henry Newman, that lonely man in the Oratory at Birmingham, who even after his "Grammar of Assent" has his doubts still, as his position on the Infallibility question abundantly proved; but do we ever find a man like Newman holding up to ridicule or denouncing with vehemence the great distinctive truths of Protestantism? No, he is too weary, too self-absorbed, too full of mental problems, and heart anxieties, and efforts to reconcile the impossible—and thus the man of all others who might have been a Prince of the Church, lives out his remaining days in obscurity and solitude, while the honours are bestowed on the men glib, crafty, ambitious, prepared to swallow anything, and who go up and down the land reviling the faith they once preached, and proclaiming as their mission "the conquest of England." I use the illustration to show that an earnest doubter is a sad man. Beware, therefore, of making light of sacred things. There is a little too much of a tendency to this in the present The proposal, for example, of Professor Tyndall, to test the reality of prayer by building two hospitals, in one of which prayer would be offered for the patients, and in the other, not—the percentages of recoveries to be afterwards watched—was an outrage on all propriety, and an evidence of entire ignorance of the very first principles of prayer. The ark of Moses was overlaid with gold, and was carried on bars, that even the Levites might not touch it, and this old lesson is a very solemn one about reverence for anything that comes from, or that belongs to, God. feel sincere compassion for the man who can exercise his small wit upon the Bible, and I deprecate even the habit of making jocular allusions where the point lies in a quotation, or more frequently, a misquotation from the Sacred Scriptures. Above all, let us beware of the ridicule of infidelity of which the text speaks. Poor Burns, whose best things were learned either on his father's farm or at his father's fireside, never wrote finer lines than these:

> Yet ne'er with wits profane to range, Be complaisance extended; An Atheist's laugh's a poor exchange For Deity offended.

But when on life we're tempest-driven, A conscience but a canker; A correspondence fixed with Heaven, Is sure a noble anchor.

Still further the passage suggests that God will always in the end be His own vindicator. However humane our interpretation of these verses may be, there is no doubt there was severe punishment. Elisha might have passed by in silence the ridicule poured upon himself; but it was different with the ridicule poured upon the Almighty. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." One of the great features in the character of the Apostle Paul was this: personal attacks he cared nothing for, but attacks on the Word of God could not be overlooked. "At my first answer," he says, writing to Timothy from Rome, and giving an account of his appearance before the Roman tribunal, "no man stood with me, but all men forsook me. I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge." That was Paul's answer to personal injuries. And in this, as in other things, Paul was a wise man, for no man's character will ever be injured in the long run but by himself. few verses previous, however, in the same second Epistle to Timothy, Paul writes: "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil, . . . of whom be thou ware also, for he hath greatly withstood our words," or, as the margin better expresses it, "our preachings." This, therefore, was not a personal matter. It belonged to God, and the preaching of God's Word, and what then: "The Lord," writes Paul to Timothy, "reward him according to his works"—a very different thing from the other. God must, God shall, be yindicated. Universalism is not a doctrine of the Bible.

The arm that is strong to save, is strong also to smite. "Whosoever falleth on this stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder." Strong language, but the words are God's words, and however strong, therefore, they must be true. Do not let us fritter away the justice of Almighty God in sentimentalism. He is a Just God as well as a Saviour God; ay, a Just God before He is a Saviour God—a Saviour God because He is a Just God, another being found in our room. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." "Kiss the Son, therefore," says the Just God-"lest ye perish from the way when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."

The passage last of all, has a peculiarly solemn relation and reference to young men. In days like these, young men have been born to a rich inheritance. The intellectual advantages enjoyed by the young men of 1878, are immensely in advance of what they were even twenty-five years ago. But I speak more particularly of religious advantages. "Responsibility," says our most eminent living historian, Mr. James Anthony Froude, "is the shadow of a great position." It is only another form of saying: "Unto whom much is given, of the same shall much be required." I desire young men to have three things—the fear of God in their hearts, fixed principles in religion, an outlet for

Christian energy, that they may do as well as get. desire young men to believe three things—that no man is wiser than God who has given them His own word to be their guide and instructor, that the man is an enemy to be dreaded who would try to persuade them that sin in any form is a light thing, and that the greatest proof of their gratitude for a godly upbringing, is to give their parents' hearts the joy of seeing them make a public profession of Christ, in membership and fellowship with The danger of our churches in the His Church. present day is not undue juvenile membership. men especially, delay, as a rule, much too long in such matters. Why should a brother wait till he is 20, 21, 25, even 30 years of age, when his sister has found her place at the Lord's Table many years before? The secret, I know, is diffidence, and perhaps a fear of inconsistency in contact with the big and often rough world outside; but it is a great mistake. Young men are far safer in the world, pronounced for Christ, than oscillating like a pendulum between doubt and decision. "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." The security under God of our young men in these great cities is the Home and the Church; and one of the most hopeful symptoms in the outlook at present over the field of the world is this—the desire on the part of so many of our educated young men to make the day of the Lord the brightest and happiest day of all the week, in

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voluntary Christian labour. This must tell on the future.

If I have a closing word, it is this. Young men, both for your own sakes and for the sakes of any others you may seek to influence, be diligent students of the Word of God. I fear it is too true we read far too much about the Bible, and far too little in the Bible. Now the Bible is emphatically The Book. All other teaching, even the best, so far as the highest departments of the soul are concerned, will never give life where there is death in trespasses and sins. The Gospel, on the other hand, is the Word of Christ standing over the cold bier and saying, as of old: "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise." "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God"—Why? "That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." Amen.

NOTE ON THE HEBREW TEXT OF II. KINGS, 11. 23—24. (See page 42.)

In this passage, although in the English version the word children occurs twice in the narrative, there are two distinct expressions in the Hebrew text, which for the sake of simplicity may thus be shewn in English letters—nearim ketannim and yeladhim. Yeledh, of which yeladhim is the plural form, is sometimes employed to describe one recently born, as in Genesis xxi. 8, where it is used of Isaac, but in such instances its use is said to be proleptic, as foreshadowing what they were to be. The general use of yeledh is to denote one much older—a boy of about 12 years at least—as in the Song of Lamech,

Genesis iv. 23, where we have veyeledh lehabburathi, as parallel to ish lephitzi, which makes it possible that yeledh may even have the meaning of ish, i.e., a man. The case is strengthened when the other expression, nearim ketannim, is considered. Naar, the singular form of nearim, is never used of mere children, and seldom indeed of minors among the Jews, i.e., of those under twelve years. True ketannim points out that the nearim here were amongst the younger members of their class, but it by no means proves that there were none younger in that class, for we have the expression katon mikketone nearim, to indicate the youngest of the nearim. Without any straining of the Hebrew words, therefore, we come to the conclusion that these "young men" were about fifteen or sixteen years of age.

The authority of the versions is not against this conclusion. The Septuagint indeed translates nearm ketannim by paidaria mikra, but as it renders yeladhim—the less extensive as regards age of the subjects in the two expressions—by paidas, its claim in this case to authority may safely be doubted. The Vulgate translates both expressions by pueri, thus acknowledging their identity; and as puer was applied to young men as long as they were in a state of pupilage, this translation supports our view. Most modern versions have recognised the similarity of the phrases, but some have hardly kept the distinction between them sufficiently in view. The German translation by Luther has for nearim ketannim, kleine knabe, and for yeladhim, kinder. The French version reads de jeunes garçons for the former, and des enfants for the latter. These different facts, therefore, go to support our conclusion, that the alleged "children" of this passage were really young men.

The Hebrew word translated in the passage "and tare"—vatte-bhakkanah—also deserves notice as helpful to the formation of a correct opinion as to the fate of the young men. The verb baka, like its cognate paka and the Syriac peka, means primarily to cleave asunder, to divide. It is so used of the cleaving of the rock in the desert, and in its lightest form—the Kal—its meaning is always that of opening by a stroke. But in the intensive form—the Piel—which we have in the text, the meaning approximates to that of taraph, to rend, to tear in pieces. But even in taraph, and still less

in bikkea—the word here—there is not the idea of such a rending as to cause instantaneous death. The idea is rather that of severe injury from which the injured may recover. The versions here also are of great value. The Septuagint reads anerrexan, which has for its root meaning in anarregnumi, the idea of breaking through or bursting, and is here naturally used of severe wounds as being openings or breakings through of the flesh. The Vulgate is even more explicitly in favour of our view as expressed in the preceding lecture, reading laceraverunt, a word which is perpetuated both in form and meaning in our English word "lacerate." The modern versions also shew that their editors took bikkea in a sense far less destructive than the old harsh view.

As still further corroborative of what has thus been advanced, the following may be quoted from the German commentator Bähr, in his annotations on the passage:

"The nearim ketannim can scarcely be 'little boys' (Luther) i.e., irresponsible children, who do not know what they say. In the first place their mocking address is opposed to this view, and still more the judgment which fell upon them. Solomon was at least twenty years old when he commenced to reign, and yet he calls himself naar katon (I. Kings iii. 7). Jeremiah also calls himself a naar at the time of his calling to be a prophet (Jeremiah i. 6, 7), likewise Joseph was so called at a time when he was at least seventeen years old (Genesis xxxvii. 2). It is also shewn by I. Kings xii. 8, 9, 10, 14, where the young counsellors of Rehoboam are yeladhim, that this word (verse 24) need not necessarily be understood of little boys. Therefore Krummacher and Cassel translate correctly by 'young people.'"

The American translator and editor of Bähr's Commentary on II. Kings—the Rev. W. G. Sumner, B.A., the rector of the Church of the Redeemer, Morristown, New Jersey—adds this note of his own: "There is an element of modesty in the use of the word by Jeremiah and Solomon at a comparatively advanced age. There were quite a number of these persons, more than forty-two according to verse 24, and *ketannim* is the word which would be used of them, if they were of various ages, from children up to young men.

It would not exclude the possibility that there were two or three older persons among them."

On the original word "tare" Bähr also has the following note: "That they are forty-two persons is not asserted in the text for vattebhakkanah only means, they split, they opened;" while the late Principal Fairbairn of Glasgow—a member of the Old Testament Revision Company and an eminent Hebrew scholar, as his "Commentary on Ezekiel" abundantly proves—writes thus under article "Elisha" in the Imperial Bible Dictionary: "In the Lord's name he pronounced an anathema, which so far took present effect that they were attacked by two she-bears out of the wood, which tare forty-two of them. It is not said that they were actually killed. This fate may indeed have befallen some of the party, but is by no means probable in regard to the greater number."

I shall only add, that I humbly consider those commentators who find in this passage a judgment of God upon "children," in fulfilment of the old threat of the Mosaic law contained in Leviticus xxvi. 21, very wide of the mark indeed. Whatever the words in Leviticus mean—"If ye walk contrary to me and will not hearken to me . . . I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and your highways shall be desolate"—they can have no relation to an incident where the highest grammatical authorities are of opinion the idea "children" cannot be entertained. I do not mean to say that the translation "young men" removes all difficulties, but it certainly lightens them, especially alongside of the modified interpretation of the expression "and tare."

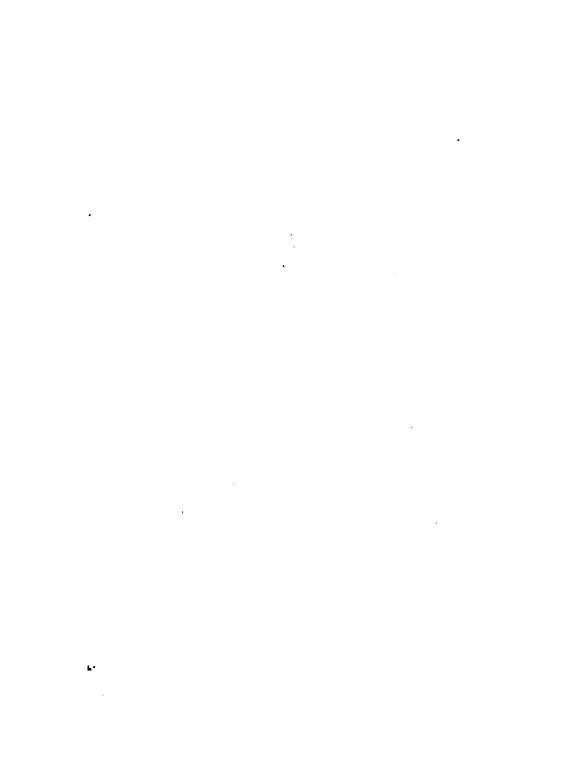
LECTURE III.

THE PERIL OF THE THREE KINGS— ELISHA THE DELIVERER.

"No department of Christian practice is more delicate, or encompassed by graver risks, than the behaviour of Christian men towards the sinful and unchristian elements which pervade society.

To select the fit occasion and discover the wise method, to adapt truth to the evil state of the hearer, and win for it a willing ear, to be cautious without being timid, and faithful but not indiscreet, this asks for a certain nice tact or indefinable instinct which is given to few, a wisdom into which there enter many elements, but of which one element surely is a spiritual gift from the Father of Lights."

REV. DR. J. OSWALD DYKES.



LECTURE III.

THE PERIL OF THE THREE KINGS— ELISHA THE DELIVERER.

2 Kings III. 10, 11.

"And the king of Israel said, Alas! that the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab! But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may enquire of the Lord by him?"

HE experimental evidence is, after all, the noblest and truest evidence in behalf of Christianity. The Canon of Scripture may furnish the unbeliever with material for endless attacks; but the man whose heart

responds in its inmost centre to the teaching of the Gospel of John, troubles himself very little with disputes about its authorship, or its relation to the writings of the other three Evangelists. The reality of the miracles, whether of the Old or of the New Testament, may be called in question; but he who is himself conscious of

the moral miracle of regeneration, and the existence of the Divine life in his soul, can rise above all wordy warfare into the serene region where the echo of the distant Voice is heard: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you." The larger, the deeper, the broader, we make the foundation of our faith, the less it will be exposed to ruin, when "the rains descend, and the floods come, and the winds blow." Everything, therefore, that Strauss and Renan, and Colenso and Matthew Arnold have said of late years may be true so far as the externals and historical connections of the Bible are concerned: they can never shake that basis of belief that finds in its own consciousness and experience from day to day unchallengeable evidence in favour of the truth as it is in Jesus. The Gospel has stood this severe test for nineteen centuries; where is the other form of religion of which the same can be said? Gavazzi, who might have been a prince of the Papal Church years ago, if he had been false to his convictions, has left it on record that, while a priest of that church his experience was this, that the great majority of those he had been called upon to visit on their death-beds were never "quite sure" of their future condition, because never "quite sure" as to whether they had performed a sufficient number of good works by way of merit in the sight of God: whereas, in his other capacity as a Protestant minister for a quarter of a century, those whom

he had thus visited, and whom he found with doubts as to their future condition, were scarcely to be counted at all, because they trusted nothing whatever to their good works, but looked alone, with the faith of little children, to the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. was right accordingly, when he made the appeal contained in the present narrative to Jehoram, King of Israel, the son of Ahab and Jezebel: "What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother." As if he had said: "If your religion has been good hitherto, let it help you to the end; why not seek Baal and his hierarchy that overspread the land, to deliver you and your royal brothers from this deadly peril; why send for me, a poor prophet of the slighted and banished Jehovah?" It is astonishing how many people change their views of the religion of Christ in the time of trouble and trial: how many people, who have never been within the walls of a church for years, will send for a minister in the lonely night watches, when they find they are going to die. This is a sad commentary on their past lives, but it is also one of the noblest tributes to the power and reality of the Gospel of the grace of God. Many a man has lived an infidel, few men have died infidels—death has shaken their infidelity out of them.

In proceeding now to the more minute consideration of the narrative before us, let me begin by expressing my regret, that in the case of many educated people Bible history, as compared with ordinary history, is so comparatively little known. Is it not the fact that many such, well read in the histories of France, or England, or Germany, know nothing and care nothing about the histories of Israel and Judah.? Probably with some, the very sacredness of their character has been a difficulty, and they have, therefore, been content that they should remain veiled in a conventional haze of Biblical antiquity and distance. We never honour the Bible by contented ignorance of anything contained in its pages. In the first days of Christianity the extreme was this—to treat the Jewish histories as a series of mystical allegories; I am afraid we are bordering in these days on the opposite extreme, and permitting many portions of these Jewish histories to be treated as mere collections of fables. There are signs of returning healthiness, and it is largely for the interest of the New Testament that we should encourage familiarity—especially in the case of our young people -with the scenes and characters of the Old Testament, as Stanley has pictured them in prose, and Keble in the poetry of "The Christian Year." No doubt we shall always read Bible history with a reverence we cannot feel for any other; but irreverence is not the danger so much in the present day, as pure ignorance, and that many who would be scandalised at themselves if they knew nothing of Cromwell, or

Frederick the Great, or General Washington, have no such feelings at the blanks in their minds on such subjects as the migrations of Abraham, the Kings of Judah and Israel, and even the captivity in Babylon.

Elisha had left Carmel for the royal city of Samaria. Jehoram was king. He had all the vices of his father, with none of the decision of his mother. He was not an idolator, but he was a profligate, and, in fact, a man of no religion whatever. He "put away the image of Baal," it is true, but it was policy and not conviction; nay, if he ever appeared to honour God in Israel at all, it was only as playing the double and dangerous part of trying to serve God and mammon at one and the same time. It has been severely but justly said of Jehoram, that "a more contemptible sovereign never ruled over Israel."

One of his tributaries was Moab. At the death of Ahab, in whose trembling hand Jezebel had tightened the reins of government, Moab threw off its allegiance and asserted independence. With the rashness that distinguished his character, Jehoram set on foot a great expedition to re-conquer Moab. In a moment of weakness, good King Jehoshaphat of Judah agreed to assist him, and the Viceroy of Edom, which was a tributary of Judah, as Moab had been of Israel, followed his sovereign's example. "I will go up," said Jehoshaphat to Jehoram. "I am as thou art, my people as thy people,

and my horses as thy horses"—one of those compromises of good men with evil men which have done so much mischief in their day to the sacred cause of liberty and religion. Besides, men like Jehoshaphat, when they consent to such compromises, injure none more than themselves. In the world we cannot help mingling with men of all characters, but we can help, and we ought to help, forming unhallowed intimacies and alliances. "What fellowship hath light with darkness?" "Evil communications corrupt good manners." "As for such as turn aside to their crooked ways, the Lord will lead them forth with the workers of iniquity." How fully these words were realised in the case of good King Jehoshaphat, we shall see. His conduct also, on the present occasion, is all the more astonishing, because he had once before done precisely the same thing with Jehoram's father, Ahab, and paid dearly for his folly. He had used precisely the same words also: "I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses." Jehoshaphat, one would think, might have remembered the ill-starred expedition and the disastrous battle of Ramoth-Gilead. But good men are not always wise, and they are often weak. One of the great features in the character of David, on the other hand, was this, that he never engaged in any national work whatever, but first he "enquired of the Lord."

The three kings marched against Moab through the

wilderness of Idumea. For seven weary days they traversed the desert. There was a fierce sun above. There was the burning sand below. There was the breath of the sirocco drying up everything in the shape of fountain or spring. Not a cloud was to be seen to indicate approaching rain. Not a drop of water could be found along the brown and barren reach. The three kings and the three armies were shut up at the south-eastern extremity of the Dead Sea, and nothing was before them apparently but death. Jehoram, as the author of the disaster, was the first to break the silence. "Alas!" he said, "that the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab!" "The Lord!"—that holy and reverend name was polluted on the lips of a man like Jehoram. And Jehoram had long been a stranger to it. It was the name of all others he had ignored, and yet in this first moment of danger, it is the name of all others at which he trembles. Nay, look at his words a little more narrowly: "Alas! that the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab!" The hypocrisy of the sympathy is only on a level with the falseness of the theology. It was Jehoram's doing, not God's: he began the expedition without ever consulting God, and now that he finds himself in trouble, he finds it also convenient to throw the blame off his own shoulders and on to the God of providence. The words, however, have a

profound meaning, and that meaning is this—to an ungodly man the time of his trouble is always (so his conscience tells him) the time of God's wrath and judgment on him. For remark the difference between Jehoram and Jehoshaphat. A good man through weakness may fall into a mistake, but he knows where to take his error, and certainly he will not blame God. It is never "light from heaven" that leads astray; although the apology has been pleaded before now. The language of Jehoshaphat was this: "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may enquire of the Lord by him?" Ah! good king Jehoshaphat, why was the enquiry not made of the Lord, before the alliance was formed, and Judah with her king and her army was committed to the expedition? Jehoshaphat felt he had made a blunder. How many of the wars of the world have been blunders, and none more than our own war against American independence a hundred years ago, and that other war of ours within the memories of most of us—in support of the most cruel and despotic crown in Europe, crimsoned with the blood of maid and mother, "slaughtered saints," and oppressed nationalities crying aloud to heaven.

There is a fine lesson at this point of the narrative, showing us what the humblest believer can do, if he will only look out for opportunities. Like Obadiah in the court of Ahab, there was a believing servant in the court of King Jehoram. Like the little Hebrew maid also,

in the house of Naaman the Syrian, this godly servant of a wicked king remembered the name of Elisha, and felt sure that he could be of use in this extremity. so happened, too, that, no doubt by special direction from heaven, Elisha was at this moment in the immediate neighbourhood of the camp, the real "chariot of Israel "and "the horseman thereof." It seems at first sight a small service that was rendered by this camp attendant of Jehoram, but through the simple mention of Elisha, he saved three kings, three armies, and humanly speaking, prevented probably the conquest of a large part of Palestine by the wild forces of Moab. The name of this servant is not given, but if his whole past life had been a preparation for this one act, and if he did no more work for God all his life after, this act alone was work sufficient for a lifetime. It is only another proof that "they also serve who only stand and wait." No child of God is so obscure but he has some influence. It was a poor struggling gardener's daughter that wrote "The Pearl of Days." It was a poor shoemaker at Portsmouth that first gave the world the idea of "Ragged Schools." The greatest name in Africa will be remembered as that of the weaver boy that became the missionary. Among the many holy surprises of the great day of account, this I believe will not be the least —the unknown workers for Christ, poor, lonely, even ignorant, but who, in the midst of all, did what they

could for the Master: watching by the weary sick bed whispering promises and peace, teaching a little child a hymn or an evening prayer, helping to reclaim some poor sinner from the evil of his ways. "Lord," we hear them saying in the wondering words, "when saw we Thee an hungred and fed Thee, or thirsty and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger and took Thee in, or naked and clothed Thee? Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee?"—
"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me!"

Elisha is brought into the presence of the three kings. Jehoram is perplexed before him. Jehoshaphat is abashed. The Viceroy of Edom being a heathen, looks on with bewilderment. Elisha has a select audience—a confederacy of three kings, in peril, imploring his succour. It was the first time the King of Israel and the Prophet of Israel had ever met. The meeting reminds us a little of that other meeting in the vineyard of Naboth, between Elijah and Jehoram's father: for the net in which Jehoram is entangled, and especially the words he uses, are substantially the position and the language of Ahab, when the cry escaped him: "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" ram had been "found:" we have seen already, he really looked on God as his "enemy;" but like Elijah with Ahab, and Paul with Felix, Festus and King Agrippa,

the Prophet of Israel resolves on great plainness of speech to the king. We must make this distinction. Elisha is not speaking as a subject. There is an official respect due to a sovereign, even if it is not due to his character, and Paul himself had the manliness once to withdraw an objectionable phrase, with the quotation:— "Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people." Elisha has been sent for as a prophet of the Lord. As a prophet of the Lord, therefore, he will say what is in his soul. It is no time for idle, empty compliment, when the lives of three armies are in danger, through the infatuated rashness of one of their kings. Unsought by him, Elisha has got the opportunity, and he will signalise this first meeting, by speaking the truth boldly to the first personage in the realm. "What have I to do with thee?" Elisha was not to be imposed upon. He knew well that although Jehoram had professedly put away the image of Baal, the prophets of Baal were still dear to his heart, and that probably some of them at that very moment were within the tents of his camp. "Get thee to the prophets of thy father and mother!" Men like Elisha, have been the men in the world's history, that have made nations and saved nations. It is needless to quote names. They rise to all our memories: Luther with Charles V., John Knox with Mary Stuart. The language of Elisha was not defiance, it was fidelity—fidelity to the name of an outraged God,

fidelity to His Divine truth and worship, both of them so slandered and dishonoured at that period in Israel. Had Elisha seen the slightest trace of repentance in Jehoram, his words undoubtedly had been different; but it was only "water" the King of Israel sought, he had no idea of confession and prayer for pardoning mercy.

God would be merciful, but it was for the sake of good King Jehoshaphat. How true that the people of God, with all their imperfections, are the moral bone and sinew of any country: "ye are the salt of the earth," "the holy seed is the substance thereof." "And Elisha said, As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee."

The three kings and the three armies had found an unexpected ally, but the spirit of the prophet was fretted and chafed by the presence of the wicked Jehoram. For the time he was unsusceptible of prophetic inspiration. His present state of mind had rendered him unfit to receive the divine light or to reflect it.

> "Calm me, my God, and keep me calm, While these hot breezes blow; Be like the night dew's cooling balm Upon earth's fevered brow."

"In quietness and in confidence" is even an Elisha's

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"strength." Our truest religious frames are those that are "peaceful, gentle, and easy to be entreated." Fanaticism is not religion. The love of Christ is to lead us to our Father God. "Religion," it has been well remarked, "can never thrive in an atmosphere of mere excitement. "Bring me a minstrel," cries the prophet. He needed medicinal music. Art, and especially the art of music, is the handmaid of religion. This is not ritual-Because art (like so many other of God's good gifts) is misused, misapplied, and degraded, as an eminent art-critic has not too sarcastically said, to the level of "wax-works" in certain sensuous services, that is no reason why there is to be nothing of the artistic and the æsthetic in the worship of God. "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?" The power of music in particular—the concord of sweet sounds—to soothe the brain, to calm the nerves and elevate the soul, is well known. The noblest passages in "Paradise Lost" were composed as Milton's daughter played to her father on the organ. We all remember how David's harp chased away the evil spirit from Saul. The father of medicine himself—Æsculapius -appears in ancient history as healing diseases with songs. The philosopher Pythagoras quieted the troubles of his mind with the lyre. A simple allusion is sufficient to the incident in Sir Walter Scott's shortest, but almost finest tale, where a frenzied son of the mist is soothed into self-restraint by the minstrelsy of Annot Lyle. Goethe, in a beautiful passage, makes the first bar of an air by Gretchen suffice to lull the sorrows of young Werther. And to close these illustrations, which might be easily multiplied, I do not know that the effect on Elisha's spirit of the minstrel's music, could be better described than by adapting these lines of James Montgomery, in his "World before the Flood," when speaking of Jubal:—

"The kings with eager hope beheld the chase Of strange emotions hurrying o'er his face:
As waked the noblest numbers to control
The tide and tempest of the prophet's soul:
Through many a maze of melody he flew—
They rose like incense, they distilled like dew:
Passed through the sufferer's breast delicious balm,
And soothed remembrance till the soul grew calm."

"Bring me a minstrel," cries the prophet. "And it came to pass when the minstrel played that the hand of the Lord came upon him."

The spirit of the prophet was calmed, and the veil of the unseen was withdrawn. Elisha said, "make this valley full of ditches." There was no wind, no rain: yet every soldier there exchanges his sword for a pickaxe, or beats it literally into a ploughshare. A hard day's work is done in faith beneath the glare of an Eastern sky, and at night, when the wearied armies lie down to rest, that Valley of the Dead Sea—whose burn-

ing sands no waters ever cooled—is channelled in all directions. Essentially it was a work of faith. God works by means. There is God's part. There is man's part. The armies were to make the ditches. Had there been no faith, there would have been no miracle. Making ditches in a sandy desert was not a likely way to bring water. But God often tries us by apparently useless means: were everything plain, where would be the room for faith?

The morning breaks. It is the hour of morning sacri-At that solemn moment, and significantly while they were discharging their religious duties (what does Daniel say—" whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel . . . touched me") relief came. Wherever the armies look, there are gushing streams. Through the gorges of the hills they come, along every narrow pass: by the ancient way of Edom that marked the boundary of the Holy Land, careering through newlymade river beds, filling every trench, and clothing the whole valley in a garment that glistens in the morning sun like cloth of gold, but dearer far than gold, yea, than much fine gold, to three despairing armies who were already preparing to die. What wonder! what gracious succour! God is love. Man's extremity is God's opportunity. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." Faith dug the ditches, believing the prophet of God; the hand of the Almighty has unlocked the reservoirs of the clouds—those clouds which are his cisterns as well as his chariots—and faith finds its reward, as it always does in childlike obedience to God. Elijah signalised his first meeting with Ahab, by a miracle of judgment—the three years' drought: Elisha signalises his first meeting with Jehoram by a miracle of mercy. Three kings and three armies are saved: "the country was filled with water."

There is but one picture more. The scouts of Moab on the distant hills, saw the golden glitter of the waters in the beams of the morning sun. Mistaking it for blood, they imagined that the incongruous alliance between Israel, and Judah, and Edom had been suddenly broken up. The cry, the old cry, re-echoed by these hills so often-"Moab, to the spoil!"-was raised. Every man that could bear arms was hurried to the front. Now was the hour for vengeance on three The mistake was sad, it was irretrievable. ancient foes. Smoking ruins, fields and orchards devastated, soon told the unchanging tale of the wretchedness of war. allied armies, we read, "beat down the cities, and on every good piece of land cast every man his stone, and filled it; and they stopped all the wells of waters, and felled all the good trees." The red history of war is everywhere the same. Stripped of its emblazonments—even when it is the spirit of patriotism defending home and hearth, fireside

and fatherland—to keep entirely in the background the villainies and pollutions that can be perpetrated when the demon of war, and the demon of lust, and the demon of Islam meet together in the breast of a fanatical and fiendish soldiery—what is war? Let the line of Schiller answer—" A fearful thing even in a righteous cause."

It was even so in Moab. Moab had its god, but not the God of "Elisha the deliverer," rich in mercy, plenteous in compassion, even to Jehoram. The god of Moab was Moloch. The war had gone against his country. Help from man seemed faraway. The sore-pressed sovereign would try an offering by fire. In view of all the people, in view of the armies of Israel, Judah, and Edom, he takes his eldest son, the heir to his own crown. He seems to love his people better than he loves his child, and therefore, to propitiate the offended god and bring victory yet to Moab, he leads his own, his eldest son forth to the sacri-He takes the knife, he lifts it, he plunges it with a father's hand into that young and quivering heart: he lays the victim on the wall of the royal city as yet unharmed, and with a fuse he lights the funeral pyre. That sight, that awful sight—and this is war—as the smoke and flames ascend to heaven, fills every heart with terror and dismay. Jehoram is appalled. Jehoshaphat sickens as he sees. Even the heathen warriors of Edom waver and fall back. That hour the war is over, the campaign finished, the confederacy of Israel, Judah, and Edom brought to an end. That bereaved king, that desolated people, that half-ruined country of Moab is the shadow on Elisha's miracle. And yet it may well teach us these three things, while it makes the miracle itself stand out in bolder and brighter relief:—

First. To thank God for the Gospel of peace, and to pray without ceasing for its maintenance among the nations, and especially the Christian nations of the earth.

Secondly. To thank God for that Divine Revelation that has destroyed idol-worship, and shows us a Father God, who asks no "first-born for our transgression, the fruit of our body for the sin of our soul," but reveals rather the great Elder Brother pointing the way back to the Father's house.

Thirdly. To seek the Living Water, which flows as freely for the world's need to-day, as the streams in the valley of Moab filled every ditch and trench. "Jesus answered and said, whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Amen.

LECTURE IV.

THE WIDOW'S POT OF OIL—THE POISONED POTTAGE— THE TWENTY BARLEY LOAVES—THE BORROWED AXE—ELISHA THE PUBLIC BENEFACTOR.

"Let the foundation of thy house consist of the word: 'For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.' For rafters and pillars of support select promise such as this: 'For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my loving-kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed.' The roof above, which is to shelter you from storms of snow, hail, and rain, arch out of the passage, 'Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you.' For windows take the words: 'Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.' Your small bed-chamber furnish with the assurance: 'Seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for thee;' and your couch of rest bestrew with the words: 'He kept him as the apple of His eye.' Ah! between such walls how sweet, how comfortable, it is to dwell."

KRUMMACHER.

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LECTURE IV.

THE WIDOW'S POT OF OIL—THE POISONED POTTAGE—
THE TWENTY BARLEY LOAVES—THE BORROWED AXE
—ELISHA THE PUBLIC BENEFACTOR.

II. KINGS IV. 1-7 AND 38-44, ALSO VI. 1-7.

"Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant, my husband, is dead," &c.

HE position of miracles in reference to a Divine Revelation is always an interesting question. I am not prepared to say that miracles form the strongest evidence of such a Revelation—I would rather say this: that

a Divine Revelation is a far stronger proof of miracles, since we cannot imagine a book like the Bible mistaken in its facts. There is the widest difference also between the miracles of the Bible and the portents and prodigies of heathen mythology. Nearly all of them were wrought for benevolent purposes. They were attested not only

by the character of Christ and Christ-like men such as Elisha, but by the confession of some of their bitterest adversaries. Nor can you explain the miracles of the Bible by bringing in the operation of unknown natural This only puts the difficulty a little further back, and does not remove it, for how came the Old Testament prophets, for example, to acquire the knowledge of such unknown natural principles, and what unknown natural principles could have enabled them to make something out of nothing? There is no satisfactory explanation of miracles except this, that they were a temporary triumph over nature, either directly as in the case of the Lord Jesus Christ by the God of nature, or indirectly by those who for the time had received Divine permission. For His own purposes, surely a God who is Almighty can repeal for the moment his most steadfast laws. Matter must be dependent on God. Matter cannot be God, therefore it cannot be eternal and unchangeable. We can quite understand accordingly how in the early days of Divine Revelation, the working of miracles was a help to faith, and why also, now that Christ has come, the working of miracles should have ceased. The stars disappear when the sun rises: and we shall have no more miracles till Christ comes again, namely, to raise the dead, and when "those who are alive and remain shall be caught up together in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air"—another

triumph over the laws of nature, by His own Divine power. The true way to look at the miracles of the Bible is to regard them as an occasional infraction of natural law, exclusively associated with Christ or His apostles or a few of the prophets, either for the most part prefiguring and preparing the way for Christianity, or serving as its illustration, and, up to a certain point, as its test. Remembering what has been advanced in the last lecture on the value of experimental evidence as alongside of historical or external, I think Coleridge has put the matter with considerable point and accuracy, when he says: "Miracles are extra-essential. Even as Christ did, so would I teach, that is, build the miracle on the faith, not the faith entirely on the miracle." other words, miracles have their place and power in the circle of the Christian evidences, although, especially in dealing with the unbeliever, stronger arguments remain behind. I do not know that I could give a better illustration of this, or show how that in dealing with the unbeliever, it is "speaking to the heart" we need, than the following touching incident related by the late Dr. Alexander McEwen, of Claremont Church, Glasgow: "I remember," he says, "when in Germany seeing the impressive rite of Confirmation administered to a large number of young people. As the girls came forward all dressed in white, to be received into Christ's fold, I heard sobs bursting, it seemed, from the very heart of a man near me, in whom I recognised one of the leading sceptical professors of the University. His only daughter was amongst those who were making this solemn profession of their faith in Christ, and it seemed as if God's voice were speaking to the father's heart with a power which all the arguments of his philosophy were unable to resist." How true it is, "a little child shall lead them," that the life of faith is the only really and truly happy life, and that an unbeliever receives no rebuke so severe as the simple, silent religiousness of his own believing child.

The four miracles of "Elisha the public benefactor," which fall to be considered in the present lecture, take us far away from camps, and battles, and sieges, and the awful tragedy on the walls of Moab; and yet they are full of important practical truth, each miracle conveying its own, and that always a different lesson, and the whole of them taken together forming a fine picture of the greatness and minuteness of that Divine condescension which assures the people of God that they have a rich Father, who is never so near them as when, in their sorest straits, He seems furthest away.

I. The first miracle is that of the "Widow's Pot of Oil." In one of the villages of Israel there lived a widow with her two sons. Josephus tells us she was the widow of Obadiah, who even in the court of Ahab "feared the Lord greatly," a statement confirmed by the

allusion in the text to her being the wife or widow of one of the sons of the prophets, who were not exclusively young men leading a cloister life, but often fathers of families. At her husband's death, the widow found herself poor, very poor, Josephus again telling us that Obadiah had exhausted what little he had in the provision he made for the persecuted prophets during Ahab's reign. Not only so, the widow found herself in debt, and, according to the law of Moses, the creditor could take her two sons and make them slaves in payment of his claim. It must be an awful thing to stand alone in the world. "There are more martyrs in cottages," it has been said, "in humble homes, and in every day life, than ever the pen of history has recorded." " Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord . . . and let me not fall into the hand of man."

Now, just as sometimes in the Gospels our Blessed Lord would appear to pass through some town or village solely for the relief or conversion of one single individual, Elisha, it would seem, was specially directed by God to this village of Israel, for the relief of this godly widow. It is something, even in this cold world, to be the widow of a man of God. How often have we seen it! God will take care of the posterity of all His Obadiahs. He can raise up friends of whom they have never heard. He can make Providential openings, lead them by "paths that they know not," and after all their sorrows

and privations, bring them out in the end to a wealthy place. "Yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." We have a distinct promise to God's people of all that is needed for themselves, and of sufficiency for their children. Climbing the rugged sides, descending the steep precipices of life, when did we ever find that these words failed?—"He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure." There are few finer representations of God in the Bible than that He is the Husband of the widow and the Father of the fatherless:

"The stranger's shield, the widow's stay, The orphan's help is He."

Some very ignorant people would decry the Psalms of David, but let them give us finer poetry or finer philanthropy in two lines than the sweet singer of Israel has given us there. Let the widow and the fatherless take comfort. The Lord Himself says, He is your "Judge," that is, the protector of your rights, and if you never forsake Him, He will never forsake you.

For look at the narrative. So poor was this widow of Obadiah, that all her worldly possessions consisted of "one pot of oil" and even that, as the original Hebrew word means, was not oil used in the preparation of food, but oil for anointing, an essential part of Oriental bathing, an excellent article of commerce, therefore—but of

no use for food in a poor family. Now remark how the faith of this godly woman was tried. The prophet tells her the secret of her future comfort lies in her " one pot of oil." She is to borrow from her neighbours, also, as many similar vessels as she can. Then she is to pour out of her one pot of oil into the others, and fill them all. And the whole of this was to be done on the mere word of Elisha. It was a real test of her faith, for what is faith if not ceasing to regard the seen and temporal, and believing in that which is unseen and eternal? was a most unlikely way certainly to multiply the oil; but then faith is not belief in the means, but belief in the living God who can work by any means. world," says Edersheim, "which ever questions the possibility of a miracle, ever clamours for miracles in their coarsest form. It will not believe that God directly helps the poor, unless it sees the clouds part and a purse drop down at their feet. The world denies miracles, but believes in magic." The excellent author might have added, as the "coarsest form" of all-spiritualism which, on the authority of a man like Dr. Forbes Winslow, is filling every asylum for the insane in America with thousands of victims every year.

It was strange employment for Obadiah's widow which Elisha proposed, but she obeyed. Befitting attitude, she shuts herself in with God. Her sons were there also the empty vessels, and the one pot of oil. Who of us

doubts that the godly woman took her sons, and there side by side with them, in their moment of extremity prayed to their father's God? I believe we pray far too little to God about worldly things, and that it would help us over many a difficulty, and save us from many a snare, if we faithfully and conscientiously "enquired at the Lord," even in temporal matters, far more than we do. Religion has been justly described as something more than a mere kind of spiritual life insurance, by which we are to provide for the soul when we come to die. It is something to live by, as well as to die by—a life of faith and quiet resting upon God from day to day, opening our whole heart to our heavenly Father, telling Him all we need, spreading all our concerns both temporal and spiritual before the The cry of Obadiah's widow could not be ignored Lord. God's children are God's in the court of Heaven. charges. Why have we not more appropriating faith to believe this? Take the Bible, underline all the "my's," and the "mine's," and the "me's"—"my rock, my fortress, my deliverer, my shield, my high tower, my horn, my refuge, my Saviour, my Lord, and my God"—why it is the focusing of all that even God is, upon yourself: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? hope in God."

The prayer was over, and the trembling widow lifts her pot of oil. What a moment that, when the first

smooth stream passes from the full to the empty vessel, and as much remains behind as was there before. Vessel after vessel her amazed sons bring—their's, too, a special and a secret joy, that if this goes on, they are free from the creditor and can never be made slaves. And still the amber stream is flowing, more oil, and yet more, till like God's own windows of heaven, the blessing only stays when there is "no more room to receive it," not another vessel left to be filled. What lessons there are here—lying rich and full. "All things are possible to him that believeth." Away with your empty vessels to God in prayer; He can supply all your need. " According to your faith, so shall it be unto you." Does any one doubt this? You have either never been tried, or you have never tried God. The measure of your faith is the measure of God's blessing. The water in that vase takes the shape of the vase itself. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." The difficulty lies not in God's ability, but in our receptiveness. Why should any of us be content to be empty vessels when God is so willing to fill us with "the oil of joy for gladness;" nay, why should any of us be content to be empty—useless, because unused, Christians in the church—when after God has filled us, we could go and fill others?

Why Elisha gave the widow no directions about the disposal of the oil, it is very easy to see. It would have interfered with the exercise of her faith. Very beauti-

fully, very artlessly, the story reads, how she returned and "told the man of God." She was to sell the oil as a matter of ordinary business, to pay her debt, and keep the balance for the maintenance of herself and her family. It would spoil the generosity of the story to comment upon it; but I cannot resist saying that this sudden and lasting relief of Obadiah's widow, is an excellent image of the remission of our debts to God offered to every one of us by the Lord Jesus Christ. "How much owest thou unto thy Lord?" The incident is well remembered of the Emperor Nicholas, during the Crimean war, going into the tent of a favourite officer overnight when he was sleeping, and finding some large accounts against him lying on the table, with the question written underneath by the officer himself, "Who will Signing the imperial autograph the Empay these?" peror wrote, "Nicholas has paid them all." incident is said to be true, but, whether true or not, I can use the illustration and say: "Timid terrified sinner, remember when thoughts of your debts to God come to trouble you, Jesus has paid them all: cast your burden on the Lord and leave it there: He is faithful who has promised."

II. The second of the four miracles before us is that known by the name of "The Poisoned Pottage;" and the story again is a story of poverty. The schools of the prophets in the days of the text were anything but

scenes of luxury at any time, and the present was a period of drought and death. How straitened, indeed, were the circumstances of the members of the sacred college at Gilgal, may be inferred from the fact that Elisha had to send one of their number into the field to collect some herbs before the mid-day meal could be prepared. The fact, however, that privation could not break up their community or separate them the one from the other, is sufficient and even beautiful evidence of the purity of their motives and of their fidelity in the work to which they had given their hearts. Affliction has always driven God's children together. In the first centuries of Christianity, when persecution abounded, there was only one church. Head to head, fleece to fleece, the sheep gather in the hollow, when the storm is breaking over the mountain, and the lightning is leaping from crag to crag.

Elisha, who would have been a welcome guest in so many other and richer homes, shares the poverty of his students, and shepherds the flock in the time of danger. "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting." Some people would flee from sorrow and cannot look on any but the sunny side of life. Death and affliction must never be named. Vain attempt to ward off the sure reality; folly and weakness not to prepare in time. We may be afraid of dying;

but what believer in Christ need be afraid of death?—that is "swallowed up in victory."

"Set on the great pot and seethe pottage," the prophet says to Gehazi. Temporalities as well as spiritualities must be attended to. The pot-herbs have been gathered, and even Elisha, a prophet of God, like the still greater Prophet who once "took a towel and girded himself," will see the frugal meal prepared. mistake, some wild cucumbers, bitter to the taste and therefore easily recognized—besides being a rank poison —were cast in among the other herbs, the student who had gathered the plants being misled by their light green leaves. "Man of God," cried the assembly, as they caught the acrid taste, and with the look of blank despair that sudden calamity so often paints on the face: "There is death in the pot." Now there could be no "death in the pot" where Elisha was. The bark could not sink where Christ was on board. The multitude could never die of hunger, when the Bread of Life was there, ready to change "five barley loaves and two small fishes" into food for them all. And yet these words suggest one of the great problems of life: the existence of so much evil and sorrow in a world made and presided over from day to day by a God of Love. Where is the "pot" of earthly provision that amid its other ingredients has no "wild gourds?"

What pleasure is unalloyed, what day, even the brightest, passes without its cloud? How many of these bitter herbs, also have come from ourselves? How many a man poisons his own pottage by folly and sin. There was no "death in the pot" in Innocence and Eden: that fatal apple has changed the garden into a sepulchre—thank God for the grave in the midst of the garden that has turned death into a blessed immortality. "Bring meal," said Elisha: and then like the bitter waters of Jericho sweetened, the poisoned pottage became nutritive diet. A whole college of students was saved.

The first thought here is surely to learn to thank "Were there God for mercies and deliverances. not ten cleansed: where are the nine?" How apt people are to say in the hour of extremity, "God help me:" do they always as passionately thank Him when the relief has come? One of the finest illustrations of gratitude to God which I remember of reading* occurred at the close of the cotton famine in our own Lancashire. The town of Staleybridge, near Manchester, had for months been suffering the deepest distress. The factories were silent, the tall chimneys were smokeless, the savings of the operatives were all gone. The civil war in America was ended at last, and one morning the first

^{*} See "David King of Israel," by the Rev. W. M. Taylor, D.D., New York, page 386.

consignment of cotton came to the town. Hearing the news, the men hastened to the railway depot, unyoked the horses from the waggon, and drew it themselves into the court-yard of one of the factories. An immense crowd soon gathered. Tears filled every eye. That cotton meant employment, and employment meant bread for the wives and children of these heroic and much-enduring men. There was a moment's pause. One solitary voice in the multitude was heard. The crowd listened. They recognised the first bars of the grand old English doxology: "Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise Him all creatures here below." Not a man, woman, or child in that vast assemblage was silent, so far as the tears coursing down their gaunt and famine-stricken faces would permit. That fine old strain has been sung under many inspiring circumstances; it was never sung with more depth of feeling or fervour of gratitude than beside the "lorry" in the court-yard of that Staleybridge mill.

It is easy also to find in Elisha and the meal a symbol of the work of Christ and of the power of the Gospel. Let us also see the emblem of successful dealing with an impure Christianity. The schools of the people in the present day are not free from their anti-Christian elements, while gross superstitious practices are overshadowing the simple faith once delivered to the saints. It is no breach of charity to assert that there is "death"

in such a "pot"-moral and spiritual death-if souls are fed with poisoned pottage in place of the bread and the water of life. There can be no breach of charity in being jealous for the truth of God. I have no right to be charitable with what does not belong to me, and God's truth is His, and neither yours nor mine. is a charity that is culpable weakness; and it is false liberalism and most dangerous catholicity that hides or obscures the Gospel, and seeks the comprehensiveness of embracing error equally with truth. ' Never more than now did we need to take care what provision we regard as nourishing food for our souls. The wild gourds and the old simple herbage will never do together. is but one cure—Elisha's "meal," the teaching of the four Gospels, Christ in the heart, and Christ on the cross, a crucified Saviour available for the world. Anything else is subverting Christianity at its very foundations, dishonouring God's truth, and poisoning with soul-destroying vanities the flock purchased with the blood of Christ.

In conclusion, let us inscribe over both of these miracles, the words of David's Thirty-third Psalm: "Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine." Let these miracles also teach us, that if anything is essential to the idea of a Man of God, it is this;

that he should be known as the counsellor and helper of the widow and the orphan. Few things are more noticeable, even in the stern law of Moses, than the urgent and precise commands to care for the widow and fatherless. Neglect of them was amongst the heaviest offences: compassion for them was a sign of practical piety. New Testament teaching is the same. "Pure religion and undefiled, before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and keep ourselves unspotted from the world."

These two miracles, still further, may well give us sunnier views of the Fatherhood of God. Who speaks of God as a Hard Taskmaster? The very first words of the prayer left us by the great Elder Brother, teach the world to say "Our Father"—mine, yours, the Father of us all. What God was in these days in Israel, He is still. He is as near us, as He was near the widow and her two sons. He can deliver us as effectually as He delivered the students in the college at Gilgal. Oliver Heywood, one of the Puritans who was ejected in 1662 by the Act of Uniformity, tells us of a mother who, when one child was taken from her, calmly bowed to the trial, saying, "God lives, blessed be my Rock, and let the God of my salvation be exalted." A second child was taken, and still the mother sang: "God lives, blessed be my Rock." At length her beloved husband was taken, and she appeared to sink into the very

depths of despair. As she sat in anguish, spending hours in weeping, the only child spared to her, a little innocent girl, came up to her knee and said-for children can say things that startle you, and that seem to come from the other world itself-" Mother, is God dead?" "God dead, my child, what do you mean?" "Mother," was the answer, "when brother and sister were taken, you said, 'God lives,' but now that father is gone, you sit and weep, and never say a word about God at all, so I thought God must be dead too." "No. my child," was the answer, "God is not dead, and He has sent you to rebuke the unbelief of my heart. God lives: blessed be my Rock, and let the God of my salvation be exalted." Yea verily, the Lord liveth; let this be the sheet-anchor of our faith, and it will hold us in Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord will prothe fiercest storm. Jehovah-Shammah, the Lord is there. "The Lord is thy keeper, the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil, He shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in, from this time forth and even for evermore."

These thoughts introduce us now to the third miracle. III. The Twenty Barley Loaves. It had been a time of famine in the land of Israel, and the poor students of the college at Gilgal had been sharers for seven years

in the national distress. Suddenly there appeared among them a stranger from Baal-Shalisha, a distance of fifteen miles, carrying first-fruits of the new harvest in the shape of twenty barley loaves and full ears of corn in the husks. By the law of Moses, the first-fruits belonged to God for sacred use, and for the use also of the priests and Levites; but days were sadly changed in Israel, for the established religion was the worship of This stranger, however, was a deeply religious man, and accordingly he found his way to Gilgal, and as a faithful steward presented to the prophet of God what, after seven years of famine, was no inconsiderable gift. It need scarcely be said that the gift was gladly accepted. Relief had come to a hundred famishing men, from a most unexpected quarter; and yet how often it is true, in the Providence of that God who can work by any means, that the less likely the Helper, the more likely is the Help. "Give unto the people," said Elisha to his servant, "that they may eat." Gehazi paused-so like the unbelief of the twelve disciples in the case of the barley-loaves—" What! should I set this before an hundred men?" "Give the people that they may eat," was the simple reply: " for thus saith the Lord, they shall eat, and shall leave thereof." What wonders can be wrought, when the hand of God is there to work Natural philosophy shows us that a few drops of water, rightly used by the hydraulic crane, may lift

the heaviest weights. The Bible itself tells us of what an ox-goad did in the hand of Shamgar, and a jawbone in the hand of Samson; a sling and a stone in the hand of David—lamps, pitchers, and trumpets in the hands of Gideon's three hundred. Even so, when God is behind, any marvel can be accomplished. "Give the people," said the prophet, "that they may eat." "So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the Lord."

The lessons lie on the surface, but they are well worth gathering up. The first is, as before, God's providential care in behalf of His children. Not one of these hundred students apparently knew anything about this man from Baal-Shalisha. His very name is not given. But God knew him, God sent him, God kept the record of his name, and he has long ere this had his reward. Nor can I imagine two more remarkable aids to faith in the being and universal benevolence of God, than those given to these sons of the prophet at Gilgal. God's Providence preserved them during seven years of famine. A man altogether unknown came in the end to their There is no greater truth in the world than this: "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him and delivereth them." "Fear the Lord. ye His saints: there is no want to them that fear Him." "This poor man cried and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." A hundred men were

fed to the full with twenty barley loaves and a few ears of corn:

"No fiery wing is seen to glide,
No cates ambrosial are supplied;
But one poor 'traveller's' rude and scanty store
Is all He asks, (and more than needs)
Who men and angels daily feeds,
And stills the wailing sea-bird on the hungry shore."*

Remark especially that God's interferences on our behalf are sometimes delayed till the last moment, to teach us that when relief comes it comes from Him. It was at the close of the seven years of famine the man came from Baal-Shalisha. The proverb tells us that "when things are at the worst they begin to mend." This is often a Divine principle as well. It was in the fourth watch of the night, when the disciples were worn out with rowing, the Master went walking over the sea to their assistance. It was after Lazarus had been dead four days, the Saviour went to Bethany. Jairus' daughter was allowed to die before the Lord passed under the ruler's roof. Never let us despair, however dark may be the outlook. "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen." "Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab." "Behold, at the close of the seven years' famine, there came a man from Baal-Shalisha."

Once again we are plainly taught in the passage that

^{*} Keble's Christian Year, Seventh Sunday after Trinity.

a really religious man will never be without the grace of liberality. There is much truth in the proverb, that "we must be just before we are generous," but the words are sometimes sadly misapplied. For example, if they are ever used as the apology for withholding contributions to the cause of Christ, they are entirely out of place, for how can a man be "just" who systematically neglects the claims of God? This is not "generosity;" if anything in the world is "justice," this surely is. seeks charity from no man. He comes in forma pauperis to no man's door. "Freely ye have received, freely give." That is the argument from "justice," and the argument is irresistible. I lay down no rules as to how much a Christian man should give to God. I am not clear about the teaching of the Systematic Beneficence Society. A-tenth may be too much for one man, and too little for another. Let the Christian conscience decide. Once let us thoroughly understand this—that we are "stewards," only stewards of what we possess, and we shall require no appeals to give. A spirituallyminded man or woman needs no such appeals, and those who have not this character will resist them Give me a man or a woman's heart for Christ, and I believe that conscientiously they will give the rest. It is easy to understand this. The spirit of the world is, "Take care of yourself first." The spirit of the Gospel is, let Christ be all in all. The spirit of the world is seen in Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The spirit of the Gospel is seen in the poor widow at the the Temple's treasury, who cast in all that she had. And however often we hear it, let us never forget that the true way to get is to give. We must sow if we would reap. We must open our hearts to others if we would have God's love "shed abroad" in our own. We can see this Divine law exemplified even in the Lord Jesus Christ. He gave Himself for us, and because of this, "God hath highly exalted Him," giving Him to "see of the travail of His soul that He may be satisfied." Believe, therefore, more and more: "There is that giveth, and yet increaseth." Very beautifully sings the authoress of "The Schonberg-Cotta Family:"—

"The heart grows rich in giving: all its wealth is living grain: Seeds which mildew in the garner, scattered, fill with gold the plain."

Nor can this peculiarity of the man from Baal-Shalisha be forgotten, namely, that he was an anonymous giver. One likes to hear of such cases—the quiet prompting of the heart leading to gifts for God. This is one special value of the free-will weekly offering every Lord's day. The aggregate may be known: the units never. Each knows his own: and if that has been given from the dictates of an enlightened Christian conscience, no other has a right to interfere.

The miracle also presents some extraordinary anticipations of the ministry while on earth of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the passage before us in fact, Elisha only teaches on a small scale what the great Prophet of the New Testament taught on a large one. This miracle at the school of the prophets in Gilgal, with the twenty barley loaves, was only the foreshadowing of Gospel times in this same land of Israel. These sons of the prophets were only seeing Christ's day, like Abraham, "afar off." Nay, there was a special propriety in these prefigurings of Christ being more than usually frequent in the days of Elisha. He was the last of the prophets of deed. After him, came the prophets of word—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and on to Malachi, till both the prophets of deed and the prophets of word were combined in their highest lustre and consummation in the Eternal "Give the people that they may eat," Son of God. "Cause the multitude sit down on the said Elisha. "What," said Gehazi, "should I set grass," said Jesus. this before an hundred men?" "What," said the twelve disciples, "are these among those many?" "They did eat and left thereof," is the record in the Second Book of Kings, "according to the word of the Lord." "They did all eat," is the record in the Gospel according to St. Matthew, "and were filled, and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full." These coincidences and anticipations of Christ

are certainly very striking, and convey their own moral and spiritual lessons.

Another thought worth gathering is this, at what "subtle points all unknown to ourselves our histories touch each other,"* and how by the pre-arrangements of His care our Heavenly Father works out His own purposes of mercy. This man from Baal-Shalisha came simply, as he thought, to present his first-fruits to God: unconsciously he preserves the lives of an hundred men. In like manner, the widow of Zarephath goes out to gather fuel: she meets Elijah who is yet to turn her mourning into gladness. The woman of Samaria goes out for her daily supply of water: she meets a Stranger who bestows upon her-salvation. Lydia goes out to the Jewish prayer meeting at the river-side at Philippi: she meets Paul and becomes the first European convert to Christianity. "He knoweth the way that I take." "He shall choose out the lot of our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom He loved." "The Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our Refuge."

IV. The last of the four miracles is the Borrowed Axe. Again we are introduced to the school of the prophets at Gilgal. Elisha was a favourite teacher, and so many students flocked to the sacred college that it became overcrowded. Rather than lose his instructions,

^{*} See "Elijah the Prophet," by the Rev. W. M. Taylor, D.D., New York, p. 46.

however, these earnest young men resolved to build themselves a house. Away out then to the woods around Jordan they went, with their brave wills and their brawny arms, to fell the timber for beams and rafters. As one student swung his axe vigorously, the head flew off. It fell into the deep water of the river. The young man was distressed, for the axe was not his own, and according to the original Hebrew, which means not only "borrowed," but "beseeched," it had cost him some difficulty to procure its loan. Of course, in the extremity, the appeal was made at once to the man of God. Elisha," says Edersheim, " failed in any emergency, the whole character of his mission would have changed." He simply cut a stout stick from one of the trees, cast it into the river where the axe-head had sunk: immediately the iron came floating to the surface, was fixed or rather guided into its new handle, and the work of the day went on. Nothing could be more simply told, and I neither like the rationalistic nor the allegorical interpretations that so completely spoil the simplicity. Some writers of the former school, for example, deny that there was any miracle at all, and would have us believe that the prophet merely thrust the branch into the deep

[†] This is the real meaning of the original Hebrew word, here rendered "swim." "And the iron was caused to float up," as in Deut. xi. 4, where the water of the Red Sea is said to have "overflowed" the horses and chariots of Pharaoh or "caused to flow up over" them,

water of the Jordan, adroitly passed it through the axehead, and raised it to the surface as the most natural thing possible. Other writers of the allegorical school, on the other hand, tell us there was much more here than a miracle, that the iron was the symbol of sin, that the wood was the symbol of peace, reconciliation, and sacrifice, and that He who died upon the wood has made all sin powerless, and restored man to his former position. Now, such interpretations are not worthy of a serious reply, and I merely mention them to shew the shifts to which men are driven when they would either put more or less into the Word of God than is there already. The story as it stands is very fine, indeed quite idyllic, a beautiful illustration of religion in common life, shewing us, in particular, how God helps His servants in the humblest ways, when He sees them willing to engage in lowly labours and homely work for Him.

We are not told how "the iron did swim," nor on natural principles can we understand it. "Nor perhaps," as one acute commentator remarks, "would we have understood it, even had we been told. For perhaps in this seeming disordering of the order of nature, there may have been a higher order as yet unknown to us—beneath this apparent disturbance of law, the operation of a higher law." To this it may be added, in how many things we all believe from day to day, the full particulars of which we do not understand. If any one is offended

at this narrative, because he cannot see "how" the iron could swim, let him try to answer these questions: "how" his own body, even a finger nail, grows—"how" food becomes nourishment—and "how" that nourishment is portioned off into the different constituent elements of the human system. This miracle may be beyond my reason, but not against it: it may be above my reason, but not above my faith.

If it be true, as the author of Christianity Himself has told us, that "not a sparrow falls to the ground without the knowledge of our Heavenly Father," and that "the very hairs of our head are all numbered," I see no difficulty whatever in believing that God permitted His servant Elisha to work a miracle, for the relief of a poor student who had not money sufficient to buy an axe to enable him to shew his willingness to do his part for God. I do not look upon God as a Being who only shews His love to His children in great things. I love to dwell on His familiar every-day mercies—what some may term, but what I do not term His little things—relief from pain, sleep by night, the quiet performance of the functions of the human body in health. The man who makes Christianity something only for Heaven, makes a sad mistake: "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that also which is to cone." A miracle like this of the swimming iron in place of

lowering my veneration for Almighty God, intensifies it a thousand fold, because it shews me that there is not a department of human life and labour where a child of God may not believe that his Father in Heaven is with him, not perhaps to work miracles, but to sustain him with the sense of His presence, and anticipate, by the very fact of that presence, the eventide of rest, when the sweat of labour shall be wiped from the brows of all His ransomed children.

We shall now gather up the lessons of this fourth miracle. And first of all, God never does for us what He has given us power to do for ourselves. Elisha, remark, was not permitted to work a miracle to build the house, or to fell the timber. No: the students at Gilgal could do both, because God had given them the health and strength. I have read an epigram to the effect that this world is a work-house, but not in the sense of being a poor-house. God desires us to regard ourselves as diligent dependants, but not as laid aside or idle paupers. He will encourage no man in that; and the miracle of the passage was wrought for a very different purpose. A poor man was in deep anxiety. He had lost another man's property. And let me say here, by way of parenthesis, that I think this of itself is sufficient to show the nature of his religion. There are some people now-a-days whom this would never have troubled in the least; but this young man, with his

almost reverential respect for what belonged to another, was in deep trouble for what he thought he had irrecoverably lost—the property probably of some poor woodman of Jordan, for whom it meant his living. Now, if the Lord Jesus Christ wrought a miracle to pay one of the Roman taxes wherewith the land of Palestine was afflicted at the hands of the oppressor, it seems to me quite as congruous with ideas of Divine decorum, that a miracle should be wrought in behalf of a poor lad who was qualifying himself for the office of the sacred ministry, and, as we would say, paying his fees (likely enough) in the only way in his power:

"They looked to Him and lightened were, Not shamed were their faces; This poor man cried, God heard, and saved Him from all his distresses."

Our Heavenly Father takes the godly poor under His special care, and whatever else may be said against this miracle, this at least can never be forgotten: one miracle in the Bible was wrought for the express purpose that a poor man might remain honest.

The miracle teaches us again that God often helps us in this world through one another. The miracle in behalf of this young man at Gilgal—making the iron "swim"—was wrought by God through the interposition of His prophet Elisha. The lesson is very plain. In his and her own way, each of us, by God's blessing, can

make the iron "swim." What an education, for example, the simple story of the Good Samaritan has given to the world! And there are so many different ways in which we can pour in the oil and the wine. When Dr. Chalmers was in the very zenith of his popularity in Glasgow, he was at times very disconsolate. He saw crowds, but he did not see conversions. Sabbath evening, as he was walking home from the church, one of his elders told him of a young man who had been brought to see the truth under the instrumentality of a sermon he had recently preached. Chalmers, as Dr. Hanna has related, was deeply moved. The tears filled his eyes, and his voice faltered, as he said: "This is the best news I have heard for long. I was beginning to think I had mistaken the leadings of Providence in coming to Glasgow; this will keep me up-you will never know, my dear friend, what good you have done me by telling me this." God helps us, I said, through one another. I wish ministers were told more stories like that. Some, perhaps, are much to blame themselves, because they shut themselves up in a kind of exclusiveness and chevaux de frise, and their people are almost afraid to go to them even to tell them of the Lord's blessing on their work. Depend upon it, however, that what our greatest living statesman-William Ewart Gladstone—has said of oratory, is true also of the Gospel minister: what he receives from his

people in mist, they themselves receive back in showers. Could Norman McLeod have only heard the words of the Glasgow blacksmith, as the dark procession passed his door to Campsie churchyard on the day of the funeral: "There goes Norman McLeod, and if he did no more good in this world than what he did to my poor soul, he would shine as the stars for ever and ever"—could McLeod, I say, have heard that, and had his life been restored, who can doubt the effect of these words upon that noble, generous, broad-minded, large-hearted man of God? God helps us through one another. It is a serious moral loss to the world that such testimonies are kept mainly for living men to read in dead men's biographies.

Nay, speaking of ministers of religion, I see a useful lesson for us in another part of this incident. When the student got the axe-head again, it had a new and not the old handle, in which I think I see this—God's Truth—the axe—must be ever the same, but if we in our interpretations have handled it wrongly, and are brought to see this in days of advancing science and broadening education, we must never hesitate to discard the old handle, and adapting ourselves to the wants of the age, put in the new one, that thus and with the more suitable instrumentality, we may go to work for God. I am giving up nothing, nay, I am helping to build the Christian fabric all the better, when I say, that there are

certain old interpretations of the Word of God (take the first chapter of Genesis) which will not do now,—handles so to speak, to which the old "axe" will no longer hold; and our duty to ourselves, to religious truth, and above all to God, demands that we frankly say so, and in no shape or form give colour to the idea that "ignorance" can ever be "the mother of devotion." We live in searching times, when nothing is taken for granted: and he is the wise religious teacher who keeps abreast of the age. Not that Christianity has anything whatever to fear: no, nothing to fear from enquiry, but very much to fear from any attempt to put the extinguisher on enquiry. "Truth, like a torch, the more it's shook, it shines." "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Last of all—the miracle teaches us a very solemn lesson as to the use of blessings restored to us by a gracious God.

I think I see that young man swinging his axe again when he received it back from Elisha. Whatever earnestness of purpose he had before, it would be double now. In like manner, who can use too well for God, restored health, restored opportunities, restored faith after a period of doubt or unbelief? Of all these originally, we may well say, "Alas! master, for it was borrowed," for even faith is "the gift of God." And so when health comes again after a long period of sickness,

and opportunities come again after we have missed many of their predecessors, and even faith comes back to the heart, after we had nearly made shipwreck of it altogether by drifting from the safe anchorage of the Bible—who can employ any of these too diligently, all the more that like the "borrowed" implement of this passage, they have been lent to us for a time to help us in preparing a durable habitation, not at the feet of Elisha, but side by side with Christ Himself on His throne of eternal glory? Restored invalid, work better for the Master now than ever. Restored believer, go and tell to others how the Lord led you through all the tangled thorns and briers of doubt, and brought you to the light again. First faith is a great responsibility, restored faith is even a greater. "Restore unto me," cried David, "the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free Spirit: then will I teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee."

Time is rapidly passing away with us all. What use are we making of "the borrowed axe?" There is life, there is substance, there are talents, there are ordinances, there are Sabbaths, there are Bibles, there are Sacraments. "Alas! Master, for they are borrowed," may be inscribed on them all. And who is there of us who has not urgent need to emphasise that "alas!"—all lent and all to be accounted for? How rises the building we are trying to rear? Is the fabric "laid" on the

One Foundation—"the Foundation laid in Zion, the tried stone, the precious corner-stone, the sure foundation?" Years of borrowed privileges, borrowed opportunities, borrowed mental, material, and spiritual endowments, are all making up their appointed number. To what use are we putting them while they continue with us, and we with them? "Alas! Master." Yet even as Elisha said, when the restored axe-head floated on the water, "Take it up to thee," and the youthful eye caught it, and the youthful hand seized it, and the strong youthful arm plied it with new vigour—even so let us "redeem the time" that remains, and if departed years have their memories of mis-employment, let the years to come be laden with richest fruitage unto God.

"O man, while in thy early years,
How prodigal of time;
Mis-spending all thy precious hours,
Thy glorious youthful prime."

"Let the time past of our life suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles." "The end of all things is at hand." "Be sober, therefore, and watch unto prayer." Amen.

LECTURE V.

THE SHUNAMITE'S SON—ELISHA THE RESTORER OF THE DEAD.

As a fond mother, when the day is o'er,
Leads by the hand her little child to bed,
Half willing, half reluctant to be led,
And leave his broken playthings on the floor,
Nor wholly reassured and comforted
By promises of others in their stead
Which, though more splendid, may not please him more;
So nature deals with us, and takes away
Our playthings one by one, and by the hand
Leads us to rest so gently, that we go
Scarce knowing if we wish to go or stay,
Being too full of sleep to understand
How far the unknown transcends the what we know.

LONGFELLOW.

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LECTURE V.

THE SHUNAMMITE'S SON— ELISHA THE RESTORER OF THE DEAD.

II. KINGS IV. 8-37.

"And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread." &c.



T has never been denied that, as a mere story, the narrative contained in these verses is one of the finest and most finished to be found either in or out of the Bible. In the great plain of Jezreel—the richest and most fertile

in the land of Israel—there was a little village, Shunem by name. In the days of the text there was nothing of what we understand by "territorial aristocracy" in the land of Palestine, because every fifty years the soil reverted to its original owners. At the same time the little village of Shunem had at least its one "great" family, whose wealth consisted in flocks and herds, and who found in these and in peaceful husbandry, congenial occupation from day to day.

On his frequent visits to "the school of the prophets" at Mount Carmel, Elisha, traversing the plain of Jezreel, had often occasion to pass through Shunem; and gradually from his appearance and bearing he became known to the Shunammites as they were busy in the fields.

Illustrious distinction! enviable title! before which "the blaze of heraldry, the pomp of power" must pale their lustre, he was spoken of as the "holy man of God." No doubt the rumour of his miracles was filling the land. No doubt these villagers of Shunem had heard of his kindness to the widow and the orphan. A whisper even may have reached them from the royal court, of how that meek and gentle stranger had once in a moment of extremity and peril saved three kings and three armies. And so, as he passed and repassed, the plough stood still, and the reapers rested on their scythes, and the sower stayed his hand as he sowed his seed in the furrow, and even the vintage song for the time was hushed, as in spring, or summer, or autumn, the prophet of God pursued his unobtrusive way.

In circumstances like these, it is not surprising that from the villagers of Shunem the news of Elisha's frequent presence should have reached what we would term "the manor-house," and the more retired circle there. That circle contained, as we read, "a great woman." There is a greatness of character which far

surpasses mere greatness of rank; but this woman of Shunem had both. It was a kind and tender heart that beat within her bosom. In a time of abounding idolatry she worshipped the God of Abraham. In her husband and her household she found her little world. She was one of the representative women of Israel; one of those "ministering women" to whom God's church and God's servants in every age have owed a debt of gratitude that has never been paid, and in whom even the Son of God Himself, when He tabernacled on earth, found His most devoted friends—last at the cross, latest at the grave, first at the sepulchre in the morning's dawn.

Hospitality had always been a pleasing feature in the land of Israel, and like Abraham, many had "entertained angels unawares." True to this national feature, the generous Shunammite with her husband's consent, constructs on the balcony of their dwelling "a prophet's chamber" for "the man of God." As becomes his character and suits his wants, it is simply furnished: a bed, a table, a candlestick, a stool—"she constrains him to eat bread." The feast, like the furniture, I can well believe, was simple and homely; but it was no ordinary meal where a prince in Israel sat at the board of "an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile." We can all imagine the conversation, and the family prayers in that "prophet's chamber," and how in these the man of God gave far more than money's worth for his entertainment.

A poor wandering prophet, he had nothing else. With Peter and John at the beautiful gate of the Temple, he might well have said: "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have, give I thee." Ay, and in the end, what piles of golden shekels could have represented what Elisha did for that Shunammite's heart and home? No man, no woman, has ever served God for nothing; it was "an hundredfold even in the present life" this mother of Shunem received, and no doubt in the end there was "glory everlasting."

Elisha was a man of God, but like so many other simple-minded men of God he was not a man of the world. I have no doubt he very much needed a servant like Gehazi, not that I admire some features of his character. He was weak, vain, boastful, and intensely covetous. Nevertheless, he was one of those shrewd practical men, who, by a kind of instinct, can take in what is called "the situation" in a moment, and who, if he had little of "the simplicity of the dove," had, we must allow, a considerable quantity of the "wisdom of the serpent." Alas! that these two qualities are not more harmoniously blended, especially in the service of Spirituality, secularity, in the true sense of the word—both are needed. Let secularity build the house; let spirituality fill the temple. Let secularity learn from spirituality to be "holy in all manner of conversation;" and let spirituality learn from secularity to

count the cost, and conquer difficulties, fighting bravely and enduring manfully to overcome. In other words, let us spiritualise the secular; but at the same time let us throw worldly wisdom into spiritual things. Then Martha and Mary shall hang, as they ought to do, companion pictures—each the helper of the other, and both well worthy of admiration.

Elisha would recompense the Shunammite; and having rendered service to the king and the army, he felt justified in the question—would she be spoken for to Jehoram or the captain of the host? The question was not unnatural. The family was one of considerable station. An introduction to court might have been of advantage. The prophet only spoke as hundreds in good society speak every day; there was certainly nothing wrong—nothing unbecoming the prophetic character—in the proposal. It was dictated by pure gratitude and generosity. Gehazi, however, understood the matter better than his master. What was needed, and what would really be prized in the great house at Shunem was —a completed home.

There is something irresistibly charming in the words: "I dwell among mine own people." There is an independence of circumstances; there is also an independence of mind. The one is very different from the other, and indeed often exists without the other. A man like Macaulay could preserve his independence of mind in

the British Parliament, when, on account of his straitened worldly circumstances, he had to sell, as his biographer so touchingly tells us, his university gold medals to help his livelihood. Nor does it follow that the man of lofty mental independence is of necessity haughty and austere. How often, on the contrary, it happens that independence and humility go hand in hand, and that those who would scorn to sacrifice their nobility before the most lordly, are found placing themselves on a level with the poorest in the land. One of the finest uses of these words: "I dwell among mine own people "-was made on a memorable occasion by a great British statesman: I refer to Mr. John Bright. Asked to assume the responsibilities of office in 1868, he replied in these terms: "There is a charming story contained in a single verse in the Old Testament; and it has always appeared to me to be a great answer that the Shunammite returned. I have not aspired to the rank of a Privy Councillor, nor the dignity of a Cabinet office. I preferred much to remain in the common rank of simple citizenship in which heretofore I have lived. When the question was put to me whether I would step into the position in which I now find myself, the answer from my heart was this, 'I dwell among mine own people; and I only now accept what I know to be a position of difficulty if not indeed of peril, because I believe the time has come when an honest

man may enter the service of the Crown, and yet like the Shunammite not dissociate himself from those who are still his own people." Blessed be God that we dwell in a land where independence of mind is not contingent on independence of circumstances, and that the ægis of the British Constitution promises the security of just and equal laws to all who "dwell among their own people" on British shores or soil. And, above all, blessed be God, that if we are His children through faith in His Son, we all belong to one "household," even the "family on earth and in heaven;" and that the time is coming, when after all the separations and trials and sorrows of earth, we shall be able to say at the right hand of the one Father, and in the midst of the "great multitude which no man can number"--" I dwell among mine own people" for evermore.

With everything in her nature, however, to make a happy home, and infinitely preferring "a pious peasantry, their country's pride," to the society of the most exalted in the land—this woman of Shunem had long felt the blank at her hearth. There was wealth and plenty; barn and storehouse were full; flocks and herds were ranging daily over wide pasture lands; there was the finest of the wheat; and on many a gay trellis clustered the grape with "branches that hung over the wall"—but what of these? They would soon be in the

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hands of strangers. There was one home at least in Israel, where in a year or two at most, the light would be extinguished for ever, and the names be remembered as only shadows of the past. Incredible announcement! joy almost too great to be true!—even there a little child would come, and nestle in a mother's arms, and in the watch of night be folded to a mother's heart—

"With such a full content of happiness
As none but mothers know."

Here, then, was the first part of the prophet's reward. For "the ark's sake," we read, "the Lord blessed the house of Obed-edom." The old kindness of the dwellers in the cottage-home at Bethany prompted the words, "Lazarus, come forth." The perfume of the alabasterbox, has not merely passed over the Saviour's head, for now that "memorial" of Mary and the Gospel itself are to travel together to the end of time. The widow of Zarephath, in a time of dearth maintained Elijah; she and her son were preserved in the midst of famine—nay, that very son she received again as "life from the dead." "He that receive ha prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward." A thousand years before these words were spoken they were fulfilled to the Shunammite woman. For the sake of that chamber on the balcony, and the bed and the table spread by loving hands, she was "spoken for," not to the king nor

to the captain of the host, but to that Sovereign who "can do according to His will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth"—she received from the Lord her son.

Several years have passed away in the home at Shunem. A changed home it has been in many senses. Affections have been called out that had no existence. Every heart in that circle has been softened and purified. Every soul has been enriched by new and tender feelings—warmed and melted by a gentle presence. That home had a little conjuror, whose spells no mage could rival. There was a teacher there, whose lessons none could resist. The brightest embellishment of the "great house" at Shunem was the little child whom God in His love had sent—the flower of the hearth, the poetry of the dwelling, the silver stream that broke in smiling ripples on the quiet shore of home. Children bring anxiety. They sometimes live to occasion sorrow. But I fear we should get on very badly without them; and that if there were no little children to soften our manners, and break up our selfishness, and invigorate our exertions, and kindle our courage, and deepen our love, and vivify and sustain the charities of life, it would be a terrible world, compared (with all its faults) with what it is to-day.

There is a real change, therefore, in the manor-house of Shunem, especially when led in his father's hand, the little boy—gray evening and rosy morning together—goes out to see his father's fields, while the reapers' song is heard over hill and dale, and far down from the deep blue of heaven, the lark is sending his carol of joy! And what a new employment for that Shunammite woman to soothe the little sorrows and supply the little wants of a child; to hear a melody unknown before in his voice; to see beauties unimagined in the clear wells of his eyes; to bend over his slumbers as angel-visited he lay and smiled; or, joining his little hands in prayer, his mother taught him morning and evening to remember the God of Abraham: "My Father, be thou the guide of my youth."

Nor would the gentle Elisha, methinks, fail to find in the Shunammite's son one of the chief charms of his visits to Shunem now. It is the expression of a universal sentiment to say, that there are few things more enjoyable than the society of an intelligent little boy*—his endless prattle, his extraordinary questions, his innocent abandon, his contagious cheerfulness, his childish love of fun. One of the noblest things about Luther was his home life, as preserved in so many beautiful German pictures; and I cannot but imagine that at Shunem Elisha often had the child between his knees or on them, now amusing him, now instructing him, now telling him

^{*} See "Elijah the Prophet," by the Rev. W. M. Taylor, D.D., New York, page 54.

some old Hebrew story, now singing to him one of David's Psalms, and then sending him back to his mother with the prayers of "a man of God," who knew when to be serious and when to be playful, and who did not believe that God gave religion to the world to make either men or children sad.

The brightest morning may be clouded.

"There is no flock, however watched and tended, But one dead lamb is there; There is no fireside, howsoe'er defended, But has one vacant chair."

And so a time came when there were disturbing unsettlements in the providence of God in the Shunammite's happy home. We speak of being "comfortably settled." "In my prosperity I said I shall never be moved." We build our Babel tower of happiness, and forget that "we know not what a day or an hour may bring forth," and that, as over that ship in mid-ocean the tempest may break, the winds blow, and the floods of heaven descend, before she can reach the quiet haven, it is "through much tribulation we are to enter the kingdom."

It was harvest time in Shunem. The fields were waving with the golden grain. The reapers were gathering the treasures of the field. The widow and the orphan, according to the beautiful Jewish custom, were gleaning among the sheaves. God had been "visiting

the earth and watering it;" He had been "settling the furrows thereof," "making it soft with showers," and "blessing the springing thereof;" and now the year "was crowned with goodness," "the pastures were clothed with flocks," " the valleys also were covered over with corn." Amid all this scene of gladness, none was happier than a little child. For him the prospect of it was the prospect of a festival. His was the swiftest foot, the merriest laugh, the gayest voice in all the throng. Like a child at play, he was incautious; and thus we may suppose that in the height of his merriment he flung his cap among the sheaves, and stood exposed to the glowing slanting rays of an early eastern sun. Such, however, was the happiness around that the father, unaccustomed to children, was deceived by the cry, "My head, my head." "Carry him to his mother," he said. He thought the boy was But the sunstroke had done its work. only tired. Mysterious Providence! In a darkened room, and on his mother's knees there lies a fevered child. His lips are parched, his eyes are glazed, his little frame is quivering. Higher rises the sun in heaven—and with each new hour of growing heat there comes a deeper moan, and keener pain, and wearier tossings, till the hour of noon. Then "the golden bowl is broken," and the sunbeam of the Shunammite returns to the light of God.

Why do little children die?* Even with our Bibles in our hands and strong faith in our hearts, I confess it is often a mystery. Through our blinding burning tears, we are very apt to wonder why these household treasures are taken away; why the loan is so short, and the return demanded so soon. As we see that Shunammite boy lying cold in death on his mother's knees, we cannot help asking—Why is this? how is this riddle to be read? Among many other things that might be said, this is true, that it is often by such sudden and unsettling providences, God reveals us to ourselves. It is the strain of the storm that shews the weak point of the vessel. It is the tension of the trial that shows where the character needs strength. God is searching that Shunammite mother through and through. She is passing through depth and depth of suffering, but up to height and height also of faith. This is being put " in the furnace" to try whether she is gilt or gold. This is the nearest and dearest taken, to try if God is not nearer and dearer still. Scholars in the spiritual school must go "from form to form." Vessels for the Master's glory must be "purged" lest they "settle on their lees." "I am the true Vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit He taketh away; and every branch that beareth

^{* &}quot; Five Little Ones in Heaven." See page 133.

fruit, He purgeth it, (i. e., He pruneth it) that it may may bring forth more fruit."

The Shunammite mother will go to the prophet of the Lord. She has carried her dead boy to the prophet's chamber. She has laid him down on the prophet's bed; and now, repressing her feelings, and even commanding her face and manner, she will seek and find the prophet himself. It was far on in the afternoon; the sun that had slain her child would soon be declining on the plain of Jezreel; and sixteen long miles lay between her and Mount Carmel, where Elisha was. But what were difficulties to a mother's love? Her purpose is formed. She knows the road well, for at many "a new moon and sabbath" she had gathered at Carmel with the circle there; and now, with the fleetest beast of burden in the stall—none the less fleet that afternoon that it carried a bereaved mother who had no thought of slacking rein—she would open her heart and tell her sorrow to the man of God upon the hill. Oh! the depth and fervour of a mother's love: purer than a flake of snow upon an infant's cheek. father's love may have its limits; a mother's will endure through all; nay, it is this very intensity of love Isaiah uses, or rather God, when he tells every mourning son and daughter: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you, and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem."

Had the Shunammite dared to hope that God would "shew wonders to the dead," and that as He had given her a son miraculously born, she would yet clasp him to her heart miraculously restored? I cannot tell, nor can I explain her meaning in laying the dead boy on Elisha's "bed," unless it may be said that in the extremity of her grief, she was looking just a little too much to Elisha as the source of help, and not so much as she ought to Elisha's God, which in turn was the reason why the prophet sent his servant with his "staff" to lay it on the child's face—an acted parable to teach that no mere help of man could avail in this matter, but that God alone must be here.

We see the afflicted woman, as in the lingering eastern sunset she reaches the slopes of Carmel. To Gehazi she has nothing to say. Nay, the merely worldly and conventional Gehazi cannot understand her, and would even "thrust her away." What she has to say is for the ear of "the holy man of God:" and if ever grief expressed in few words the anguish of a broken heart, it was in the passionate outburst, before which even an Elisha might have quailed—"Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, do not deceive me?" Scarce knew the prophet what to do. There was the heavy affliction itself. There was God's concealment of it from His servant—strengthening, I think, the idea, that the Shunammite had been looking more to Elisha than to God, and convincing both her and us that God's miracles are not magic, nor His revelations soothsaying.

The sun was setting behind the hills of the Levant when four travellers might have been seen leaving "the school of the prophets" on the brow of Carmel where now the convent stands, and preparing themselves for a long night journey. They were Elisha, Gehazi, the wondering weeping mother, and the driver of the animal on which she rode. Gehazi goes on before; and there through the black night and along the same road Elijah ran, when exposed to the roar of the tempest he outstripped in their flight the royal horses, as Ahab drove from the contest at Carmel—Elisha, the Shunammite, and the servant follow. Oh! these sad and heavy night journeys, when the awful wire flashes the news that a father, a mother, a child is dying, and you feel in the agony of your spirit that even the greatest speed is slow to take you to their side. Some of life's landmarks that stand out most prominent and memorable in many hearts are associated with journeys like these; and his must be a cold heart indeed, who, if he has ever travelled the same anxious, sleepless, weary way, does not sympathise to his inmost and tenderest core with this bereaved woman. as she travels back to her shadowed dwelling, and the chamber where amid the hush and the darkness her dead child lies.

Elisha's "staff" could do nothing; "there was neither voice, nor hearing;" "behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed."

It was the early morning when Elisha entered that prophet's chamber, where he had met so often the living boy. He knew the miracle that had been wrought at Zarephath; and even at that moment—for so a beautiful tradition tells us, which I wish to believe—the widow's son of Zarephath was in one of the schools of the prophets preparing for his future work, when he was known in Israel as the prophet Jonah. Could the miracle of Zarephath be repeated? If so, Elisha must proceed in Elijah's way. "The kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." "Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." "Elisha went in, therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the Lord." Then came the old prophetic act as at Zarephath—symbolical of the desired communication of the quickening power of God. "He lay upon the child; he stretched himself upon the child; his mouth upon his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, his hands on his hands." Then he rose; up and down the chamber (for so the words literally mean) he walked; and again he stretched himself upon the child. The little cold body becomes warm. Seven times it gives signs of restored respiration.

With a look of wonder "the child opens his eyes." What is he doing? Where is his mother? He in Elisha's bed; Elisha bending over him with beaming, brimming eye. No pain in his head; no fever in his frame. Is it fact or fancy, reality or a dream? Here was the second part of "the prophet's reward." "Call this Shunammite; and when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son."

As to what followed, the Holy Spirit gives no information in the sacred record. Could the child tell where he had been, what sights he had seen, and the secrets of that world from which he had come out? I do not know, and no one knows, and it will be better, therefore, we do not enquire. One thing, however, I I can read the gratitude to God in that Shunem That Shunammite mother had been touched and tried in the tenderest part of her being; and she had been delivered. She had been a believer in God before: she is a stronger and more decided believer now. Nay, I can well imagine the new feelings with which this Jewish mother dedicated her boy again to the God of Abraham, even as I wish to believe another beautiful Jewish tradition that tells us, that in after years that boy was known in Israel as the prophet Habbakuk. No doubt, at least, of the thankfulness of the mother's soul. I never knew a family even of patriarchal size, where the absence of one child did not make a blank that every member of the

household felt. But to this mother of Shunem this one child was her all; and, therefore, the gratitude of her heart was in proportion to the restoration.

I read in this passage some rich consolation to parents bereaved of little children. "It is not the will of your Father who is in Heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." "The Lord knoweth them that are His," both who they are and where they are, the least as well as the greatest. They have gone to sleep at night, they shall rise in the morning—at the gate of glory, Christ shall say to many a happy mother, "Take up thy son"—"See, thy son liveth." There may we all meet the treasures we have loved and lost, and with the land of the dying beneath us, and the land of the living before us, mention death and the grave for the last time—"O grave, where is thy victory, O death, where is thy sting?"

And this suggests my last thought, for I read in this Old Testament miracle a prophecy of the New Testament doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. This miracle was a prediction. God could never have granted Elisha's prayer, had it not been in His Divine foreknowledge absolutely certain that "the only-begotten of the Father" would yet be "the first begotten of the dead"—"the first-fruits of them that sleep." Between the resurrection of this little child and the resurrection of us all there will be a wide interval; and the resurrection of

Christ stands between—the cause of both.* When Christ rose the resurrection of this little child was a long way in the past; and our resurrection, compared with Christ's, is still a long way in the future. Nevertheless, both are indissolubly connected with the emptiness of Joseph's tomb. "He is not here, he is risen, as He said; Come, see the place where the Lord lay." "Thy dead men shall live; together with my dead body shall they arise; awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust, for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead." Elisha was "a man of God," but Christ Jesus is the God of man, yea, the God-man, the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the last, who alone can say, "I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore." Death is not the end The harp is not broken, but only awakes to a of man. nobler minstrelsy in the choir of Heaven. The pillar is not shattered, but is only transferred to a more glorious building in the City of our God. The race is not lost, for the Conqueror wears a crown on his head, and waves in His hand the palm of everlasting victory. The ship has not gone to pieces, but lies in safe and eternal anchorage in the calm bay of Heaven. "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which

^{*} See " Elijah the Prophet," by the Rev. Dr. Taylor, page 60.

have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. Amen.

FIVE LITTLE ONES IN HEAVEN.

"If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."-GENESIS zliii. 14.

So Jacob cried, in Judah's famished land, When Benjamin was sought for Egypt's Prince; And at new breaches in the family band The cry has broke from many a father since.

Sad heart, rebel not: whether daughter, son, Mourning and yet unmurmuring strive to say, In all submissiveness: "Thy will be done, "Not mine, but thine, my God, the better way."

Five little ones in Heaven: all folded safe Within those arms, once stretched upon the Cross: Why should I grieve, or unforgiving chafe At what is gain to THEM if to ME loss?

These Angel-Spirits hover still, and rise In recollections of the years bygone: The little child in Memory never dies, That little Morning-Star shines always on.

Say, have they met at the great Father's hearth These brothers and these sisters from us riven? They never knew each other on the earth, Can they now know each other up in Heaven?

" For ever with the Lord:" be still my heart; These children more belonged to God than me; Had they been spared, we would have done our part, Their better nursing, Saviour, is with Thee, If Jesse, David's father, murmured not, When for the king was sought the Shepherd's lyre; Why should I grudge the little empty cot, If harps are needed in the upper Choir?

Nay, as I hear that wail, those sobbings wild, I grasp God's "taking from the ill to come:" The Son of Jesse mourned his little child, 'He mourned more bitterly for Absalom.

Our sorrows we can count, but not our joys, From break of morning to the fall of eve They meet us—not earth's transient, childish toys, But His all-comprehensive "Peace I leave."

O Father, God of mercy and of grace, O Saviour, bearing still Thy people's woes, O Spirit, pouring from the Holy Place "The oil of joy for mourning" till life's close.

If these dear children's deaths be our new life:
If from their death we flee to Him who died:
If by the keenness of the Pruning-knife
We learn, more in the great Rock's Cleft to hide:

Then it is well: for ever, ever well;
A few short years, God's "little while," and then,—
No more bereavement, death-beds, funeral knell,
And we shall meet our parted Babes again.

Selected from "FIVE LITTLE ONES IN HEAVEN," by the present Author. "Printed for private circulation." Liverpool, 1874.

LECTURE VI.

THE LITTLE HEBREW MAID— ELISHA IN HIS UNSEEN INFLUENCE.

"A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine;
Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,
Makes that and the action fine.

This is the famous stone
That turneth all to gold:
For that which God doth touch and own
Cannot for less be told."

HERBERT.



LECTURE VI.

THE LITTLE HEBREW MAID— ELISHA IN HIS UNSEEN INFLUENCE.

II. KINGS v. 1-5.

"And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land'of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife." &c.

> E are introduced in the present narrative to one of the quiet by-paths of history one of the green spots in the Old Testament which have a charm and a verdure for all time. The story is short, but it

has many beautiful lessons both for young and old; in fact, there is nothing either in the Old Testament or the New that surpasses as an evidence of what a godly upbringing can achieve, this artless tale of the little Hebrew maid with her recollections of the prophet of God.

Syria, at the time of the text, was the open and constant enemy of the land of Israel. It was in a battle with Syria that Ahab fell, and Jewish history tells us that the hand that "drew the bow at a venture" and by the arrow from which the royal heart was pierced, was the hand of Naaman the Syrian. For years after the death of Ahab, the Syrians maintained a continual border warfare with the people of Palestine. They desolated their cornfields. They destroyed their vineyards. They carried away their cattle. They even entered the homes of unsuspecting families and took captive the maidens of Israel for sale in the slave-market of Damascus. It was in one of these frequent forays the little maid of the text was taken. It requires no vivid imagination to paint the scene. The marauders broke upon the villages.

"The 'Syrian' came down like the wolf on the fold."

Ere many hours had gone, there were smoking ruins, mangled bodies, wasted homesteads, and mourning family hearths—such things were ever in the track of the ancient Syrian as of the modern Turk. Over one home, in particular, there swept a terrible calamity. They called their child; she did not answer. They sought her in the hiding-places of the village woods; she was not to be found. They searched for her dead body; it was not to be seen. Worse than death was dishonour; she had been carried away to slavery and shame.

So we speak, and so the village no doubt thought. But "all the paths of our God are mercy and truth." The Lord was in this matter, and out of the mouth of this little Hebrew maid He was going "to ordain strength because of His enemies," that he might "still the enemy and the avenger." One morning in the crowded slave-market of Damascus, and among a cowering trembling band of the daughters of Israel like herself, the steward of Naaman the Syrian selects the Hebrew maid as the domestic attendant for the wife of his lord.*

The figure of Naaman himself has been boldly drawn in the sacred narrative. His name in the original Syriac signifies "lovely,"† and it may have responded to his outward appearance. He was the greatest warrior of his country. A dashing leader, "open-handed, open-hearted, though quick tempered," as he has been graphically painted, he was the favourite, the idol of the people.

^{* &}quot;At Damascus," says the late Professor Eadie, writing in 1870, "we looked into the slave market. There were that day for sale ten girls, all black Nubians, or negroes, save one little handsome fair Circassian. The price asked for the Circassian was £81, for the others only £8 each."—" Life of John Eadie, D.D., LL.D., page 289, (London: Macmillan and Co.)

⁺ The word "Naaman" is found both in Hebrew and Syriac, and in the former language is derived from the root naem, to be pleasant or lovely, whence we have the substantive "noam," translated Psalm xxvii. 4, "beauty." In Arabic Naaman is the name of the god of love, and also of a beautiful flower. See Ewald's "History of Israel," vol. 4, p. 86.

Everything of this world that could purchase happiness was his. He had rank, wealth, military renown. He stood next the throne. He was the confidential adviser of the king in all matters of state. Living in Damascus -for three thousand years the garden of the Easthe had the enjoyments of an earthly Paradise at his command. And yet there was a worm at the root of all. The princely Naaman carried about with him everywhere what he could not conceal, spoiling all his pleasure, dimming all his lustre, and making the commander-inchief of Syria chafe and writhe among all his honours and popularity. The finger of God had written "But" after all his glories—" he was a leper." The humblest soldier in the army would never have changed places with his general. The meanest slave in his palace was a happier man than his chief. Naaman's was "the white leprosy," and not all the magicians of Syria, nor talismans of Eastern physicians that have wrought such wonders in the pages of fiction, nor all the gods of Syria to boot, could help him in the hour of his dire distress. "Be not high-minded but fear." More or less every man has his "but," and God means that he should have it. It may not be leprosy, but if even Paul had his "thorn in the flesh," we shall have ours either in flesh or spirit, mind, body, or estate. "He builds too low who builds beneath the skies." It is only in Heaven "the inhabitant never says I am sick," and "they

hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither doth the sun light upon them, nor any heat."

There was a caged bird in Naaman's home. Even in her bondage she sometimes sang a song of Zion; and her father's house, the Bible that her mother taught her, and "the prophet in Samaria," whom her father and mother had taken her to hear, were often in her thoughts. the faith, the reverence of a little child. Familiarity with God's truth has made us irreverent, and we imagine we know so much better than God that we may safely doubt or disbelieve His most solemn declarations. as a man like Dr. Guthrie, when they asked him on his deathbed at Hastings, what he would like them to do, replied: "Oh! sing me some of the bairns' hymns"—just as a man like Carlyle wrote not long ago, that he was now beginning to feel himself on the brink of eternity, and that the only result of scientific theories of development, natural selection, and such like upon him, was to drive him from this "gospel of dirt" back to what his mother taught him at her knee when a child: "What is man's chief end? To glorify God and enjoy Him for ever" even so in the spirit of these two great though widely different men, be ours the faith of the little child, to which so many of our best men come back, not in their dotage, as some would say, but when they have seen the utter vanity of every thing else—the theology of the little child that learns by instinct to cling to a Living Person, and rises far above all vain speculation in the simple words which we must each of us make our own, if we would enter the kingdom of Heaven:

"If I come to Jesus, He will make me glad;
He will give me pleasure, when my heart is sad:
If I come to Jesus, He will take my hand,
He will gently lead me, to the better Land."

"Would God" then, said the little Hebrew maid, as she saw Naaman's beauty of face and form, "consuming away like a moth," and the palace turned into a house of mourning: "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy." Here was a gleam of light. Naaman's wife reports the words to her husband. The dying man begins to hope for life. He has tried many things; he will try this too. How he fared we shall see in our next lecture—being delivered not merely from his leprosy, but from his idolatry, and obtaining in one day both health and salvation. Meanwhile there are many invaluable truths brought before us in this simple story, up to the point we have now reached.

First of all, I think the narrative clearly shows us that while God intended the Jews under the Old Testament economy to be the guardians of Divine truth, He never intended that they should be its jailors. What I mean is this—God was never unwilling that nations outside of Judaism should be made acquainted with Divine Reve-

lation. The Jews were no doubt set apart by themselves in the land of Palestine. But why? Not so much to prevent truth from passing out, as to prevent error from passing in. In the commercial intercourse of the Jews with other nations, seeds of truth found their way into many Gentile lands even under the Old Testament dispensation. God never "left Himself without a witness," as Paul told the philosophers on Mars Hill. There was a court of the Gentiles in the Jewish temple itself to receive the proselytes. The widow of Zarephath and the Syro-Phœnician mother are additional illustra-An Ethiopian chamberlain had a copy of the prophet Isaiah. In Greece especially there were many Jewish synagogues, like the oratory at the river side of Philippi, long before the advent of Christ. The incident in the text, therefore, was part of God's preparation of the world for the dawn of the Gospel—making bare His arm in the sight of all nations, that "the ends of the earth might see and know the salvation of our God." Jewish colonists took their Hebrew Scriptures with them whereever they went, and it would be difficult to say, where then as now, Jews did not go. Such men became pioneers of a still greater dispensation of religion than their own. And the result of the part which this little Hebrew maid alone unconsciously bore in God's Providential dealings with the Gentile world, was to vindicate, in the conversion of a man like Naaman, the supremacy

and glory of the One Jehovah over every false God. We must correct our ideas, therefore, of the land of Palestine in the days of the text having a monopoly of Divine Revelation. Even then, in many parts of the world the leaven was beginning to leaven the whole lump; nay, four hundred years before, a direct ancestress of Christ from Moab was received, in the person of Ruth, into the bosom of the Jewish Church.

The second great truth I find in this passage is the inestimable blessing of early religious instruction. Far away from home and from all religious influence, in a land of heathers and surrounded by idolators, this little Hebrew maid remembers at Damascus the first impressions of her early years. The German poet and philosopher Richter has finely said that the first colours painted on the mind are usually immortal—the first mountain we have seen, the first strain of music we have heard, the first look we have had of the ocean. words are true to universal feeling. No traveller ever forgets his first look of Mont Blanc-no ear that is trained to harmony ever forgets the first time it listened to the Messiah of Handel. In like manner first religious impressions—the impressions made in the Home school, at the family hearth, or a mother's side, are never effaced. This Jewish girl never forgot the prophet of God in Samaria, who went about the land with his staff and his mantle, of whom so many strange stories were told, who

was kind to the widow and the orphan, and who had even raised from the dead the Shunammite's Son. shall we say of the man who would try to destroy the hallowed memories of a little child, or wither the faith in God of a young and tender heart? I am aware of no religious duty in the present day more urgent than that of being scrupulously careful about how we deal with our children in matters of eternal interest. I can imagine nothing more awful in this world than for a child grown to manhood to become an unbeliever, and to charge home upon his father the guilt and blame, because in unguarded moments he suggested doubts of Christianity, or adopted a tone in relation to sacred things, as if he did not believe them at all. Suppose that I should preach a sermon from this pulpit some Sabbath evening -which may God in His mercy forbid—in which I should suggest doubts about the Divinity of Christ, the necessity of pardon and salvation, or any other cardinal truth or doctrine of the Gospel, and that years after I should hear that a man lay dying in an hospital in New York, who said he had been in Liverpool one Sunday night, that he had been led by curiosity to hear a certain preacher, that one after another the preacher destroyed in his sermon what beliefs he had in Christianity, and that now he had no faith in Christ at all, and was dying without God and therefore without hope in the world? Who can wonder that a possibility like that—to say

nothing of responsibility to God on "that day," as Paul expresses it, makes us who are ministers serious and careful about the kind of Gospel we preach, lest the blood of souls should be on our skirts, and men should die and pass out into eternity, saying of us as the mother of David Hume said of her son, that he took her Bible from her, and gave her nothing in return but cold philosophy, that lay like ice upon her heart. Let no man say this is cant. Such things have happened, and could be described were there need. I use the illustration to show our solemn responsibility as fathers mothers in the religious training of our children. It is richly-rewarded work, if we look at it from the right point. We paint with the colours of eternity, and such work can never be in vain.

> "The clay is moist and soft: now, now make haste And form the pitcher, for the wheel runs fast."

Any one who ever saw a potter at his wheel understands the meaning of these two lines. A parent's hand can do nothing for his child, that by God's blessing will bring him more comfort than fanning the spark of early piety: and that parent's hand had better be cut off altogether than put before his child anything that would lead him to believe that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is an unreality. The conduct of James Mill to his son John Stuart Mill may well be a beacon in this respect. He taught him to speak Greek at the age of

three years, when he ought to have been teaching him the twenty-third Psalm. This was the beginning of that life of loneliness and wretchedness his own pen has described, than which, I am bold enough to say, there is nothing more utterly melancholy in the whole range of Autobiography. In the spring-time of life bring the children to Christ: let them have their Child's Bible, and let them "know" the Holy Scriptures, which are "able to make them wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ." This is laying a solid foundation for the future, sowing seeds of saving truth which will bring a golden harvest.

The third lesson I desire to draw from this narrative is, that the humblest and apparently most unfavourable situations and circumstances in life, leave us all the opportunity of doing good. Now, that morning in Damascus, when this little Hebrew maid made use of the words before us: "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria," if any one had asked to see the (humanly speaking) least influential and most powerless person in the whole city, it could have been matter of no surprise if he had been directed to the domestic attendant upon the wife of Naaman. poor, friendless, a stranger, a captive, a slave—of what use was she in the world? The question may be answered by saying-had she died the night before, how changed the whole future of Naaman the Syrian would

have been! She spoke but a few simple words, but these were enough to change the gall in that cup of her master's into the sweetest honey, to alter the current of his whole life, and in the end to bring him to the knowledge of the true God.

There is a rushlight. What is the use of it? It may set a city on fire—something as apparently trivial led to the great fire of Chicago. Chemistry tells us there is no waste of power in nature. The gossamer web of the insect, the leaves of autumn, the snow-flakes of winter, all have their use in the great laboratory of the earth. The story of the poor widow in the Orkneys is familiar. It was before the days of lighthouses in these lonely regions. But every night at sunset she placed her lighted candle at the window, and the fisherman toiling out in the tempest saw it, prayed that the widow's God might bless the widow, and by the help of that lighted candle, found his way into the harbour safe. "I can do nothing for God" is the cry of indolence.

There is a grain of corn. What is the use of it? One of our poets tells us in the words:

"A grain of corn, an infant's hand,
May plant upon an inch of land,
Whence twenty stalks may spring and yield
Enough to stock a little field.
The harvest of that field might then
Be multiplied to ten times ten;
Which sown thrice more, would furnish bread
Wherewith an army might be fed."

It is not the opportunity we need to work for God, it is the will, the desire, the heart. O Lord, make us a willing people in the day of the Gospel's power.

I see in this little Hebrew maid, fourthly, a fine example of fidelity to religion. In the palace of Naaman, far from the ordinances of grace, young, helpless, unprotected, and with none near her to keep alive the old flame of piety in her heart, we could scarcely have wondered had this Jewish maiden forgotten her early training in a land of idols, and "lapsed"—as we say in the present day of thousands who have not her excuse—into carelessness, idolatry, and heathenism. Perhaps even it might have served her interests to worship with her mistress in the house of Rimmon, and bow down to Baal, and Ashtaroth, and all the Syrian train. Those who approve of "doing at Rome as the Romans do," would no doubt admire and applaud such conduct. Those who tell us in their analysis of religious belief that all religions, after all, are pretty much alike, and that it does not seriously matter whether a man believes in Zoroaster, Confucius, Buddha, or Jesus Christ—would no doubt say that the right thing for this Jewish maiden to have done, was to "make the best of both worlds," in the sense at least of making sure of this. But remark, on the other hand, the ordeal she went through. A poor solitary girl in Damascus, she was true to her father's God. Her heart in Sa**maria.** She had a great secret, and she

nursed it, no doubt in many a prayer, when she stretched her weary limbs to rest at night. She might be Naaman's slave, but she was of the number of God's hidden ones; and God's child was willing to wait, till her Father in Heaven wrought out her redemption. It is earnestly to be wished that every professed believer in Christ was as faithful to him in trying circumstances, especially when moving in circles of society -of which there are far too many at the present moment—where religion and religious faith are almost regarded as the sign of a weak mind. There was a bravery about this Jewish maiden that may read a salutary lesson to many a cowardly Christian. Hers was the spirit out of which God has made many a noble martyr. I can believe it was only very little of Divine truth she knew; but that little she held with a life-grasp. And let me say here that I would far rather have this Hebrew maiden's "little" truth, held with a whole faith, than a whole confession of truth professedly held, but in the loosest and widest form. We greatly need honesty in religious matters, and it is the want of it that is doing so much mischief with our thinking men. I quarrel with no man's faith. To his own Master he stands or he falls. I can respect—and I do respect—a conscientious Roman Catholic. I must say, on the other hand, and with equal frankness, I do not respect the Ritualist, who plays the part of a Roman Catholic in a

Protestant Church. I believe in civil liberty; but I do not believe in calling men "martyrs" who break vows they have solemnly made, and who having accepted a position under the State, proceed deliberately and unblushingly to trample on the State's authority. Let men be honest, and if they have convictions they wish to promulgate, let them do so, neither within the bowers, nor behind the buttresses of a Church establishment, but in the free and open battle-field of public opinion, where they can be met on equal terms. The singularity both in the Church and in the world that has won the victory, has been the singularity that has been consistent. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."

Last of all, the passage shews us how true it is that God works in a mysterious way to perform His wonders. What an extraordinary thing that the destinies of two such extremes as that of Naaman and his little Jewish slave-girl should be linked together in the way we have seen. Her master to be her trophy—and all Syria yet to resound with the confession that "there was no God like unto the God of Jeshurun." Naaman's leprosy again to prove his greatest mercy, although the whole land had regarded it as both his and their greatest calamity. We are poor judges. The disciples thought they saw a spectre; it was their loving Lord. Naaman thought his leprosy "the skeleton in the house," pointing with bony finger to a speedy grave. God had

made all the arrangements without ever consulting Naaman; and they were all links in the golden chain by which he was to be lifted from the kingdom of darkness, and placed as a humble believer in the kingdom of God.

Well might Cowper sing: "God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform." That beautiful hymn has a history. The morning he wrote it Cowper was in one of his dark moods. Melancholy was preying on his mind. Everything was full of doubt and gloom. He was afraid of his own shadow. The world was all wrong. There could be no God, or if there was, He was a merciless fury. He made up his mind he would destroy He went out to the seashore, on the south of England where he was then residing. He harnessed his friend's pony carriage. He drove the ponies swiftly along the road in his haste to commit suicide.* By and by the clouds gathered. A storm came on. was tossed and the waves came rolling in upon the beach. The thunder pealed, and the sheets of lightning were unusually vivid. At a sharp turn of the road, the ponies stood still and refused to go farther. Cowper

^{*} This, as is well known, was no solitary instance. "He repeatedly attempted self-murder," says Gilfillan in his "Life of Cowper" (Edin., W. P. Nimmo, 1868, p. 15), "and every one remembers how in one of these frightful attempts, he was saved through the breaking of a garter, by which he had strung himself to his bed."

started; he stood still: he looked up at the clouds, and then down at the ponies who were saving him from destruction. He turned their heads, he drove back quicker than before, he went to his room, he closed the door, he never opened it again, till the agony past, he had written the hymn, which has a new and most touching meaning when we know the circumstances of its composition, and remember where the imagery was found:—

"God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea, And rides upon the storm.

Ye fearful saints fresh courage take, The clouds ye so much dread, Are big with mercy, and shall break In blessings on your head."

Poor pensive Cowper! well might he sing of God's "mysterious" Providence that morning, saving him from self-destruction. But the same unseen Providence is round about us all, and working "mysteriously" in our behalf every day that we live. This little Hebrew maid—a mere waif, drift weed in the eyes of the world—carries with her to heathen captivity the seeds of truth and piety, which have invested her with imperishable distinction. It was "the doing of the Lord:" even as it is "marvellous in our eyes." "The Lord reigneth: let

the earth rejoice." "Say among the heathen, that the Lord reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved."

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in Him will I trust. Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust." Amen.

LECTURE VII.

NAAMAN THE SYRIAN—ELISHA THE INSTRUMENT OF THE GREAT PHYSICIAN.

"What was it that recommended Naaman to the notice and regard of the Jehovah of Israel, leading him to select that wild olive among the rocks of Syria, to be grafted into the true olivetree? It is worthy of remembrance that the Divine Redeemer, in the course of His earthly ministry, took this same story of the Syrian soldier to enforce and illustrate the theme of which we speak. The lepers of the Covenant-nation were passed by. The leper of a Gentile kingdom, and that kingdom too, the sworn foe of Israel, was selected. Still our God can fashion the unlikeliest and unshapeliest stones for His heavenly Temple. Side by side with Rimmon's shrine, is to be erected a new altar-stone, with the strange inscription carved upon it by a proud heathen, 'Jehovah Rophi'—'I am the Lord that healeth thee.'"

REV. DR. J. R. MACDUFF.



LECTURE VII.

NAAMAN THE SYRIAN-ELISHA THE INSTRUMENT OF THE GREAT PHYSICIAN.

II. Kings v. 4---19.

"So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha," &c.

HE remark has often been made that there is no passage of the Word of God of the same extent which more strikingly bears out the declaration of the apostle Paul that "all Scripture" is "profitable for doctrine, for

reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," than the story of Naaman the Syrian. Many Old Testament incidents are "profitable" for each of these things separately, but this is "profitable" for the whole of them put together.

No man's personal greatness can ever place him beyond the reach of the ordinary trials and afflictions of life. Naaman, the greatest warrior of his country, as we have seen, "beautiful," "lovely," "goodly to look upon," was "a leper," and "a leper as white as snow." Travellers at the present day tell us that the most doleful memories of their visits to the Holy Land are associated with the sight of lepers, and especially with the rows of them seated outside the Jaffa and Damascus gates at Jerusalem. Naaman may well teach us the vanity of human wishes, and the hollowness of earthly glory. In his oratorio of the same name Sir Michael Costa has a fine chorus, representing the maidens of Syria coming forth with timbrel and harp to greet the military hero on his return from the triumphs of war:

"The many-voiced crowd, exulting shouteth loud;
Our enemies are servants now."

Immediately after, the plague-spot comes to embitter every hour of existence, and whisper the humbling lesson in the warrior's ears: "Let not the mighty man glory in his might;" "Verily man at his best estate is altogether vanity."

The first ray of hope, as already noticed, came from a most unexpected quarter. The few words of the little Hebrew maid revived in Naaman's breast the extinguished hope of cure, and soldierlike—true to the instinct of immediate surrender to duty—no sooner does he hear the proposal than without delay, ques-

tioning, misgiving, or the spirit of doubt in any form, he resolves to discover "the prophet that is in Samaria." We may pass over the letter of King Ben-Hadad to King Jehoram (v. 6) with this remark—that Naaman simply looked upon Elisha as upon the necromancers and magicians of his own country, namely, as a person attached to the royal court, entirely, therefore, under the royal authority, and bound to do whatever his king commanded. No one was more astonished at the letter of the Syrian monarch than his royal brother of Israel. He knew very well what power he had over Elisha; and idolater though he was, his heart told him, as one commentator has expressed it, he might as well try to command the lightning where to strike as enter the sacred circle where the prophet of God exercised his awful prerogative. In fact King Jehoram concluded that the request about Elisha only covered some hostile project, on the part of Syria, and that a new quarrel was sought, with subsequent humiliations.

And yet I can see a Divine meaning in the whole of this. The object was to convince Naaman, his master, and all who would ever hear of the miracle about to be wrought, that God alone must be in the matter. Elisha was no mere enchanter, under any king's authority save that of the King of Kings. All the gods of Syria had been tried and they had signally failed: if Naaman was to be cured, therefore, it must be

by irresistible demonstration that such cure could only come from the God of Israel, "the one only living and true God." His prophet owned allegiance in his spiritual work to no power on earth, and could never be bought by all the talents of gold and silver and rich festal garments Naaman carried in his train. It was an old and invaluable lesson, even under the Old Testament dispensation of the church's spiritual independence in spiritual matters—freedom from subjection in things of the soul to any civil power. Elisha was a good citizen and a loyal subject, but in the work which God had sent him to do in Israel, neither King Ben-Hadad nor King Jehoram dare interfere. fore hast thou rent thy clothes," said the prophet's servant to the king, as he delivered the message from his master, "let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel."

Let us draw another lesson. Poor Naaman in the presence of the King of Israel with King Ben-Hadad's letter of recommendation in his hand, is the world—fallen humanity trying to get cured of the malady of sin by philosophy, government, education, science and art. All are valuable in their own place, but they can never minister to a mind diseased, or reconcile one solitary sinner to his God. Like King Jehoram, so to speak, when invited to work like this, "they rend their clothes." The wounds are unhealed, the malady is

unreached—they simply cannot do it. Behold in such circumstances, Christianity's message by the lips of her apostles in every age: "Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to ME." Then when everything else has failed, the Gospel steps to the front, and with its Divine medicine and its great Physician, pours in the oil and the wine, "heals" not "slightly," but fully "the hurt of the daughter of the people," binds up every wound, and says to leprous humanity: "Go in peace, thy faith in Christ Jesus hath made you whole."

It was in all the magnificence of oriental pomp that Naaman left Damascus. The brilliant procession would pass through the western gate, through which to the present hour the pilgrim caravan annually passes on its way to Mecca—" the gate of God," as it is termed, say rather, "the gate of death," for hundreds of those who pass through it never return. The leper-warrior travelled in the chariot that had driven him to many a field of triumph. He had a vast retinue of servants with their rich turbans, and camels and litter-horses, conveying the ingots and talents,* in addition to the silk dresses and garments from the looms of Damascus, which formed at that period so much of the wealth of the East.

^{*} The "ten talents of silver and six thousand pieces of gold" which Naaman took with him amounted to about £12,000 of British money.

It was indeed "barbaric pearl and gold" was taking with him, to bestow on his deliverer a princely reward. No doubt, to escape the midday heat, the cavalcade started at night or at early morning. They crossed the flanks of Mount Hermon. In the distance, as the sun was rising, they saw "the tower of Lebanon, which looketh towards Damascus." They passed the walls of Hazor, with their memories of Barak and Sisera. The hills of Naphtali next came into view, and they skirted the reedy jungle which borders the lake of Merom, where Joshua fought his last battle with the chiefs of Canaan. Then they would reach the Jordan, wind along the shore of the Lake of Gennesaret, pass through the oaks of Tabor, where if Naaman could have seen the future, a little spot to the right, lying among green hills and oliveyards, would have had a special interest for him, for it was there, years after, in the synagogue of Nazareth, the Son of God Himself, in His very first sermon, made use of this journey to show that He had "other sheep which were not of this fold"-" many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet, and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Many other points in the pilgrimage might be noted, specially interesting to Naaman as a warrior —Gilboa, Jezreel, the very hill-tops of Ephraim, where often before deadly conflict he had no doubt remarked the watch-fires at night of the spearmen of Israel. At . length he reaches Samaria, and crest-fallen by his reception from the king, stands, with very little hope indeed, before the door of Elisha.

Let us pause for a moment to say that this journey of Naaman's furnishes no unfit parallel to the journey of life, and especially the life of the Christian. Suppose he failed and was compelled to return to Damascus duped and deceived by the tale of an idle girl. But no—on the chariot moved: that heathen warrior might well teach us all strong, ay obstinate faith. I can almost hear him singing one of David's psalms: "O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember Thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life." From the moment Naaman set out, he never stopped short: never turned his horses' heads, never dreamed of retracing his steps, only to be sure of an early tomb among the cypresses of Damascus. And happy, thrice happy are those who in the Christian pilgrimage "hold fast the beginning of their confidence steadfast unto the end"-" looking unto Jesus." Having entered at first, like Naaman through "the gate of God," they "shall not die but live," passing rather through the higher gates of righteousness to praise the Lord, when the battle is fought and the victory won, and the pilgrim's progress is concluded, like Bunyan's pilgrim, amid the pealing of the bells of the new Jerusalem.

Naaman is standing at Elisha's door: but the holy man comes not forth. The warrior frets. This is a cold reception: it is strange neglect. Never before had the illustrious soldier been doomed to stand a suppliant at the gate. The pride of the warrior is almost overcoming the necessities of the leper. "Behold, I thought he will surely come out to me." At length there is a message. And what are its contents? Is it some costly sacrifice to be offered to the God of Heaven?—a hecatomb of victims on the altar—some austere vow to be practised—some heavy payment from his treasures or rigorous penance to be made? No: "go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." That was all.

What could be the meaning? First of all, Elisha was aiming at something more than the mere cure of Naaman from leprosy. He had a deeper disease: he was a heathen, an idolator. Again, Naaman from his rank and position was counting on receiving exceptional attention: and he must be taught that unlike the gods of Syria, there was "no respect of persons" with the God of Israel, that with Him "the rich and the poor met together," and that if he came for healing from Elisha as the servant of that God, he must come not as a great military commander, "the hero of a hundred fights,"

but simply and solely as a poor perishing leper. It was extraordinary news to Naaman; still he must clearly understand it, even as we must understand it also, there being no royal road to Heaven, save along the King's highway, and through the sufferings and death of the King's Son. Still further, suppose Elisha had gone out to Naaman, and with any interposing sign or manipulation whatever had cured him of his leprosy, was this not the danger that Naaman would regard Elisha only as a more accomplished magician than those he had left behind him in his native land? Elisha therefore must not appear in the matter in any form whatever, save as giving the message by Divine direction, that God might be All in In addition, the end to be gained was emphatically All. served by the fact that Naaman was directed to "go and wash in Jordan." He resented the idea at once. bathing was essential to the cure, why might he not bathe in the beautiful streams of his native country? Bathe in Jordan? Its origin was in the sulphurous springs of Lebanon. Its outlet was into a feetid lake, whose bituminous and sullen waters exhaled only pestilence and death. No winds ever rippled its waves. birds crossed its surface in their flight but they perished.

Besides, the impetuous current of the Jordan rendered it dangerous. Its willow-fringed banks were the abodes of ferocious beasts of prey, while its wild and rugged scenery made it the congenial resort of

the demoniacal and the insane. "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus," exclaimed Naaman, "better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage." In one sense he was correct. Abana and Pharpar, flowing from the northern sides of Mount Hermon, and irrigating the orchards and gardens of Damascus, had long made the Syrian capital the garden of the East.* They broke from sparry cave and mountain tarn, high up the ridges of the table-land. Through rich and fertile plains, through fruitful and fragrant meadow with "the smell of the field which the Lord had blessed," and anon gliding through fairest and freshest woods, whose beauty they reflected in their crystal mirror-Abana and Pharpar went singing on their way. Naaman the man was nearly too much for Naaman the leper. This was the crisis with him, and fortunate it was for the master that he had servants beside him at that moment wiser than himself.

The enraged warrior has commanded the chariot away

^{* &}quot;Naaman," says the late Professor Eadie, writing from the spot in 1870, "was right in extolling Abana and Pharpar in comparison with the Jordan. We encamped at the latter of the two rivers of Damascus. It comes down cold, clear, sparkling, and rapid from Hermon, clad with snow to the very base. The Abana is cut into a thousand streamlets as it comes near Damascus, and circulates through gardens and groves all round the city, which are of surprising verdure and loveliness. It is a Moslem Paradise."—" Life of John Eadie, D.D., LL.D.," page 287.

from the prophet's gate. Already he threatens to take the road back to Damascus. His faith falters—knowing who he was, we need not wonder—and during these perilous seconds his cure is nearly wrecked and all hopes of it given to the wind. Rightly spoke the attendants: the method was a simple method—it was one that involved no labour. And what is this but just the Gospel, in all its simplicity, directness, exclusiveness, but certainty to the world. No doubt these are just the reasons why so many thousands are averse to the Gospel. If God would ask them to do "some great thing," then they would do it. But "the offence of the Cross" lies in its being "Heaven's easy, artless, unencumbered plan." These words, "I THOUGHT," have often been said to contain the germ of all rationalism. Behold the Gospel in its simplicity: "Wash and be clean;" "Believe and live"in its directness: "Go wash now and be clean;" "To-day if ye will hear His voice"—in its exclusiveness: Abana and Pharpar were rivers, but not the river—there is but one Gospel, one Gospel way, one Mediator between God and man, "neither is there salvation in any other"—in its certainty: "Then went he down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God, and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." Even so, " seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while

He is near." "If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee."

"I say to thee, do thou repeat,
To the first man thou mayest meet,
In lane, highway, and open street,
That he, and we, and all men move
Under a canopy of love,
As broad as the blue sky above."

Naaman had no idea when he brought his servants with him from Damascus, for what purpose he was really bringing them. He thought it no doubt due to his position in the court of Syria, and his visit to a neighbouring court with the king of Syria's letter—necessary also for looking after his costly gifts. In the providence of God, however, those servants had gone with Naaman for a very different object, and at the brink of the Jordan he might well have congratulated himself he had at last taken their counsel. He makes the first plunge into the brown muddy current. Perhaps he imagined his recovery would be gradual. But there is no change: he is still a leper. A second plunge he makes, while his attendants are standing breathless looking on, but like a "very robe of Nessus," his leprosy is clinging to him yet. A third time, with palpitating heart, he goes down beneath the waters, but again he rises to the surface a leper. The fourth, the fifth, and the sixth time it is the same; his skin retains the deadly snowy white—there is but

one plunge more. He makes it; and then, reminding us of St. Paul's description of the resurrection—he is "changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." The deadly snowy white becomes the ruddy glow of new found health. In the beautiful figure of the narrative, "his flesh comes again to him like the flesh of a little child," with roses on its cheek sent there to shew the mother that all is well within. The passage of a new life shoots through the warrior's whole frame, and he leaps upon the sward a prouder and infinitely more thankful man, than when in Sir Michael Costa's Song of Victory, wedded to music worthy of the theme:

"With sheathed swords and bows unstrung,
And spears and shields with garlands hung,
The mighty men of valour come,
Hailing the Captain of the war,
Returning in his prancing car,
Triumphal to his home."

In these few moments in the Jordan, Naaman had lived an age; and when he came out, both body and soul had undergone a change. It was like passing from one world to another. He had lost his leprosy. He had lost his idolatry also. He had risen "from vile to pure, from earthly to divine." We may safely believe in sudden conversion so long as we have Naaman the Syrian in the Old Testament, and Zaccheus the publican in the New. "Behold," said Naaman, "as he returned to

Elisha's gate, the subject not of one but of two great transformations, "now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel." It was a noble confession,—no ordinary confession of faith truly, when we remember by whom it was made, before whom it was made,—boldly and with soldierlike unshrinkingness, in the presence of his own servants,—and the risks he ran on his return to Syria by the adoption of an alien creed.

Thus, also, we see the power, the working of the simple Gospel. Let us abandon the idea that we can do anything "as of ourselves." Let us follow implicitly the "Thus saith the Lord." Why neglect or reject, saying, "Behold, I thought?" In one most important sense, we have nothing to do with "thinking." God has done the thinking; we have to do the believing. It is this sceptical "thinking," doubting, speculating, that has made shipwreck of thousands of souls. Some one replies: "What right have you to stand there, and dictate my belief to me?" My brother, you make a mistake. I am not dictating your belief to you. But God is, and He has the right to do it. He sets before you in this Bible the reasonable religion that He has thought out and completed, and I say to you very solemnly, Take heed of these words, "I thought." God Himself has told you that "His thoughts are not like your thoughts, nor His ways as your ways." "Take heed, therefore, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief." "Beware lest ye also, being led away by the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness." "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts." It is these that do the mischief. Reason is the sister, the handmaid of Faith. But remember, the command of Christ is not "Reason yourself unto Me, but come unto Me." When we have really "come," that will settle the reasoning. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." Do not find flaws and scars in the Temple-pillars: enter the shrine.

I am familiar with no finer remark on this subject than one of the late Sir James Simpson's, when appealing to this class of minds, he says, "Now really, my dear friend, why can't you take God at His word, why not stoop down as Naaman did, wash as Naaman did, and come out clean as Naaman did—stoop, wash, and come out a king?" We have got a good way on the road to Heaven when we have learned to believe this—that God says what He means and means what He says: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

The moral power of the miracle wrought by God through His servant Elisha, was not to be impaired. Elisha refused the gifts of Naaman. Why was this? He was poor enough. The schools of the prophets at that time in Israel were by no means richly endowed. Much good also could have been done with Naaman's silver and gold. Besides, Elisha had accepted the hospitality of

the grateful Shunammite, even as St. Paul in later years accepted the hospitality of Lydia, and "Mnason of Cyprus the old disciple." But then remark, Naaman was returning to Syria, and the idea might get possession of the heathen mind that "the gifts of God could be purchased with money;" it might be said the remedy was the result of Elisha's hope of reward. No therefore-what a fine sense of honour the Bible always has: the line must be drawn deep and broad. It must never be possible for any one in Syria to say: "The cure of Naaman was a rare piece of fortune for that Hebrew prophet; he is just like our own magicians; magic can be bought in Israel just as in Syria; Elisha made a fine thing of it." No, I say again—the cure of Naaman's leprosy must appear to all ages the fruit of pure Divine compassion, and of that alone, even as there is no weapon put into the hands of the enemy capable of doing greater havoc to true religion than just this—that a man is a professedly Christian man or minister, simply to make "a gain of godliness."

The two remaining incidents in this story are exceedingly touching and very beautiful; and to me they are not the less touching and beautiful that some narrow-minded men have found superstition in the one, and a compromise with idolatry in the other. What was wrong, for example, with Naaman's request to have "two mules' burdens of earth" from the land of Israel to carry

with him back to his own country? Would that soil not be a perpetual memorial of his cure and his conversion? And if he built an altar to God on the top of it, whereon to offer his burnt sacrifices, was that not a brave thing to do in Syria, before the very Court of Ben-Hadad, and a testimony to them all that he was in no way ashamed of the new religion he had embraced? What a beautiful keepsake of the land to which he owed so much that little mound of the earth of Palestine would be-every glance at it, as it stood there so widely different from the Syrian shrines of porphyry and marble, reminding him of the fact if not of the words: "Thy vows are upon me, O God!" I know the danger of relic worship and I have seen in Aix-la-Chapelle, and elsewhere in Continental countries, the uses to which Romanism can pervert it for its own ends. But might Naaman not "take pleasure in the stones" and "favour the dust of Zion"—all the more that his earthen altar was consecrated to God—without sinful adoration such as that of the bones or dust of imaginary saints? Can it be wrong to prize the gift of affection given us in love's earliest years—the family Bible with our own name in it written by a hand now mouldering in the tomb—the locks of our children's hair, and even the little shoes once worn by feet that are now walking the streets of the new Jerusalem—the staff on which a father leaned the chair in which perhaps a mother died?

these things become wrong, we may pronounce it wrong for the grateful Syrian of this passage to have made the modest request for the "two mules' burden of earth," which for aught we know, after he was done with them in life, he meant in the spirit at least of a true Jew, should cover him in death, that in the last long sleep he might lie on a pillow of the earth of that land which was promised to Abraham—" a miniature Campo Santo," as MacDuff has said, "among the royal tombs of Damascus."

I have no difficulty either with the second request, although it seems to involve a much more serious matter. "In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the House of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow down myself in the House of Rimmon; when I bow down myself in the House of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing." Now there are several things in this sentence I admire very much—Naaman's honesty, sincerity, and candour, his sensitive conscience, his determination at all hazards to cleave to Jehovah: for the inference plainly is, that if Elisha had said "no" to his request, he would have surrendered all he had—place, power, and emolument rather than dishonour the name of the God of Israel. But remark, Elisha did not say "no," he left it for the present an open question; he knew he could trust Naaman, and he believed that amid his future perplexities—if he had any—there would

arise to him—as there always does "unto the upright"—
"Light in the darkness." The prophet pronounced no final or authoritative deliverance whatever; he gave him the simple benediction, "Go in peace." He did not expect "the full stature in the cradle of conversion."*

But wherein lay the scruples of Naaman? that day before Elisha and his own servants avowed the God of the Hebrews to be his God. He was returning to Syria, and the king and court would see him offering his burnt sacrifices on his earthen altar, after the manner of the Jews' religion. But as prime minister of Syria his duty would lead him to attend his sovereign to the Temple of Rimmon, to support his person and even "accommodate himself to his motions," as Dr. Thomson remarks; and the new convert wished Elisha to understand that this was simply a civil service to his master, not a homage to the heathen god. If Elisha did not condemn this, I cannot see how we are entitled to do so; all the more that it is sometimes a very difficult thing to draw with absolute precision the line between what may be rendered or yielded to Cæsar and what must be rendered or yielded to God. A fine lesson lies in Naaman's tender conscience, and there the matter may safely be left. We can easily see how Naaman might enjoy religious toleration in Syria, and have concessions

^{*} Bishop Hall.

in the matter of religious disabilities, while official attendance at the Temple of Rimmon, with the royal arm locked in his, and the motions of his body swaying with those of the royal person, could not be dispensed with. At the same time I desire to interpose a word of caution. passage must not be interpreted as meaning that to all of us, any part of Christian duty may safely remain "an open question." Naaman might be proof enough against temptation, but that is no apology for men of less pronounced religious views imperilling their faith on debateable ground and living constantly on the border line. The true thing to do with a precipice is to keep as far from it as possible. It is proper, however, to learn the breadth of the Bible even in the Old Testament, which, as embodied in Elisha with Naaman in the present instance, was leaving the matter to individual conscience, to be regulated by time, place, and experience, and anticipating the large-hearted and liberal words of St. Paul, applicable to so many points where wise men will never dogmatise and Christian men will always abound in charity: "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."

In conclusion, the grand lesson of this whole narrative is, "Wash and be clean." And that "washing" for us must be in the blood of Christ. "Though thou wash thee with nitre," says God, "and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me"—if we attempt

to find cleansing in any other quarter. "If I wash thee not," says the Lord Jesus, "thou hast no part with me." The very tears that bathe the feet of Christ wash out no sins, even when they are falling thickest and flowing fastest; it is not the tears we shed but the blood that He shed that forms the price of pardon and brings the purity and peace. Yet sin-stained soul, ay, the foulest, beside that crimson margin of the fountain opened "for sin and for uncleanness," you are welcome to wash, and you are certain to be cleansed. Grace is still free, salvation is still full, and "the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin."

"Only believe." One of the grandest earthly illustrations of faith I know, is that of Columbus: his finding the fruits and nuts on the shores of Portugal; how he took them in his hand and looked at them; how he came to believe there was another continent; how he left his home and friends, when they all thought him out of his senses; how he set sail in the ship for the unknown land; how the crew broke out in mutiny; how they threatened to kill him, if he would not take them back—while there at the helm Columbus stood, undaunted, believing he was right, till one morning the cry of "land" was heard, the day broke, and lo! there was a new world. This was faith. But you, unrenewed soul, have far stronger reasons to believe in Christ than Columbus had to believe in the existence of America.

With you it is certainty, and you have every encouragement, for while he met with many disappointments from the Courts of Europe, the King of Kings says to every one of you, "Come unto me."

Above all, see your Saviour on the cross. find it difficult to "be angry, and sin not," it is looking at that lonely sufferer there, crowned with thorns, while the worst of wicked men mocked Him with cruel mockery in death, as "Hail, King of the Jews." Yet He submitted; His grand object being to save sinners. "This man receiveth sinners." You expect to find the physician in the sick-room. The lifeboat is in its proper place among the raging waters. In like manner, Christ is waiting to receive sinners, "even the chief." Through Him, God is knocking at the door of your hearts. Let Him in; it is the one way of safety. You have seen the lighthouse, and how at full tide, while the waves are tumbling over it, and it seems to have nothing to stand on, it is nevertheless quite secure, because its foundation is deep down in the solid rock. This will be your condition, unrenewed soul, once you know God in Christ, the Rock of Ages.

> "There is a fountain filled with blood Drawn from Emmanuel's veins, And sinners plunged beneath that flood, Lose all their guilty stains."

> > Amen.

LECTURE VIII.

THE SIN OF GEHAZI-ELISHA UNMASKING DECEPTION.

"All true, all faultless, all in tune
Creation's wondrous choir,
Opened in mystic unison
To last till time expire;
Man only mars the sweet accord
O'erpowering with harsh din
The music of Thy works and word,
Ill matched with grief and sin."

KEBLE.



LECTURE VIII.

THE SIN OF GEHAZI-ELISHA UNMASKING DECEPTION.

II. KINGS V. 20 TO THE END.

"But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian in not receiving at his hands that which he brought." &c.

HE sculpture gallery of the Bible, while it contains on lofty pedestals many brave and noble heroes, contains also as beacons and warnings men in whom the spirit of the heroic was entirely absent, the victims of the

basest passions, who seem to have broken loose at once from the teachings of conscience and the laws of God. The story of Naaman, as we have seen, is "profitable" for "instruction in righteousness;" the story of Gehazi is chiefly "profitable" for rebuke and "correction." His is the one gloomy picture, the one iron visage in the whole of this narrative. The little Hebrew maid has

her own artless and beautiful lessons of goodness, and especially of a godly upbringing. Even Naaman's other servants had the wisdom to interpose at a critical moment, making their master for ever their debtor. It was reserved for Gehazi alone to spoil—so far as not one but many sins in one could spoil—the unique and touching cure of the great warrior of Syria at the hands of the prophet of God.

Let us consider Gehazi's sin, or rather as I have just said, the compound it presents of many sins, shewing, too, how one sin can lead on to and generate another.

Remark the Covetousness. Elisha had declined Naaman's gratefully offered gift. The warrior had taken leave of the prophet. The caravan was on its way back to Damascus. Elisha had returned to his work in the school of the prophets, satisfied he had done his duty. But Gehazi watches the cavalcade as it disappears in the distance. He had seen the rich festal garments, the ingots of silver, the well-filled bags of gold. A prize like that was not within his reach every day. What a fool, he thought, he would be, if he did not embrace the opportunity, and make for himself at one stroke a fortune for life; and so uttering in his guilty soliloquy the words, "But as the Lord liveth"—not Elisha's divine and solemn watchword, but the ruffian oath still to be heard from the lips of foul-mouthed Arabs at the present day, and alas! not without its ungodly counterpart among ourselves—Gehazi vows that he will not "spare" "Naaman this Syrian," and with fleet foot disappears through the woods of Samaria to secure his plunder. "Beware," says the Apostle, "of covetousness"—"covetousness which is idolatry." "Lay not up for yourselves," says the Master, "treasures on earth," which the moth and the rust "eat into and corrupt," as the words literally mean. What did Gehazi gain in the end? He is only chasing the caravan, to realise the words of God by the mouth of His prophet Isaiah: "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him."

Remark his Untruthfulness. With high-born courtesy, with the gratitude also of the new-born nature added to it, Naaman, who shortly before scorned to descend from his chariot at Elisha's door, now leaps from that chariot to receive Elisha's servant. Then came the Two poor students from the college atclever lie. Ephraim had come to Elisha. The prophet who had little for himself had nothing for them. Would Naaman out of his previously volunteered generosity oblige Elisha with one talent of silver and two changes of garments? In princely thankfulness and unsuspectingness of heart, the warrior doubles the talent, and sends Gehazi away with £700 of British money. He returns to his master. "Whence camest thou, Gehazi?" "Thy servant," was the answer, "went no whither." And then like the woman described by Solomon, he "wiped his mouth,"

and said: "I have done no wickedness." I do not know whether to be more appalled at this point of the narrative, with the unblushing effrontery, the cunning of the tale of the two poor scholars, or the motive power of one bad passion that can so easily rouse into action a whole army of depraved and slumbering forces. There are few things in the Old Testament from a moral point of view more awful than this glib, well-feigned, and afterwards tremendously punished falsehood.

But more than this—there is Theft here. The £700 and the two changes of garment were for Elisha. what did Gehazi do? When he and the two Syrian servants had reached "the tower," that is, the ascent to Elisha's house in the hill country of Samaria,—the word literally means "a piece of rising ground,"—Gehazi thanked Naaman's soldiers (for they were probably two of the camp servants) for their services; "he let the men go," and then he took his own time and way to carry the treasure leisurely to some hiding-place near the house, till he could mature his plans and make off with the spoil. This, I have said, was theft, for the money and property so foully obtained, even on his own showing, were not his but his master's—that master who had confided in him for so many long years and now reaped this reward of base ingratitude. I think I see Gehazi when in saying good-bye to the Syrian bearers of the booty, he imagines he has given the finishing touch to his scheme. It reminds one vividly of Macbeth when he comes out from the bed-room at midnight, after he has plunged the dagger into the heart of Duncan. It is all finished now, he thinks, and the only witnesses who can criminate him are already posting back to Naaman, and will all of them soon be safe in Damascus. Long before they can ever communicate with Elisha, he will be off and his rich prize along with him. Gehazi plotted well: but how soon he found that even gold may be purchased too dear, and that "the lying tongue is but for a moment."

Still further—there is Hypocrisy here. Who was Gehazi?—The servant of Elisha the man of God. Wherever his master went he went with him. He was known all over the land. The Shunammite woman knew him, the students in all the schools of the prophets, the villagers in every Jewish hamlet—as with "the holy man of God" he "passed by continually." They had seen him carrying Elisha's staff, carrying also Elisha's mantle, the mantle of the rapt and sainted Elijah. Surely nearness to grace is not grace. The man who is only playing a part, a mere actor in sacred scenes and sacred things, will become very hardened in the end and sink very low. The dog, it has been said, that sleeps beside the anvil ceases to fear the sparks. This man, Gehazi, had been almost living at the gate of He was no poor heathen that knew no better. He was no wild Bedouin of the desert, or some rough

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mountaineer, who did the manual labour, "a hewer of wood or a drawer of water," in the Samaritan sacred college where Elisha lived. His hypocrisy was cruelty of the worst kind to the prophet of God. It laid his honour in the dust by robbing the cure of Naaman of its fine disinterested character, and sent the cured man and convert home to Damascus with the very idea Elisha did so much to prevent—namely, that any mere money payment could ever, or in any shape or form, become its equivalent. To say the very least of it, Gehazi had shamefully compromised Elisha. He put one sop indeed in the mouth of his conscience. "Behold," he soliloquised again, "my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian," as if he had said: "This man is only a heathen, an idolater, and am I to stand on very rigid terms with him: if he had been a fellow-countryman, things might have been different, but this Syrian may justly contribute to me in my straits a little of his superfluous wealth." There is nothing more melancholy than to see the way some people try to appease their conscience, especially when they cast an air of religion over what they are doing, as John Foster says in one of his Essays of Peter the Great: "I have no doubt he said grace before he swallowed Poland." Gehazi is the withered fig-tree of the Old Testament—not so much the fruitless cumberer, as the base, the very base pretender. There he lived in the house of Elisha—his companion, and to some extent, his confidant—"Gehazi," as the description runs, "the servant of Elisha the man of God." The fig-tree (to carry out the emblem) was under the influence of sun, and dew, and rain, shewing, too, every now and again a rustling of branches, and yet in the end there was "nothing but leaves." We cannot wonder that the well-deserved malediction came down at last; and then, "How soon was the fig-tree withered away."

Let us consider Gehazi in his detection. The guilt-won treasure, the arch-plotter thought, was safe. He enters the house accordingly, and proceeds to his round of daily duty. "Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" asked Elisha. How are we to regard this question? I look at it in this light, as giving the culprit a chance even at the eleventh hour, to confess and repent in sackcloth and ashes. wound had gone deep into the prophet's soul. still he would give Gehazi "space"-trusting he would also ask--" grace for repentance." "Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" But the hypocrite stands unabashed. There is no quiver on the lip, no tremor in the frame. With perfect guilelessness and innocence the answer comes; "Thy servant went no whither." One would have thought it would have taken a long course of practised deception to have brought Gehazi to thisthe man who had heard Elisha's prayers, listened to his counsels, and sung with him no doubt often in his journeys, the same Psalms of David. Suppose this

occurring between Samuel and Eli, or between Timothy and Paul, and we have some kind of a parallel between the foster-father Elisha and Gehazi, more his son in the faith than an ordinary domestic in his home. servant went no whither." He is thinking of what he will do with the seven hundred pounds. He will buy olive-yards, and vineyards, and sheep and oxen; he will hire men-servants, and maid-servants, and live a very different life from the hard bed he has had, and still harder fare, in his wanderings through the land with Elisha. It must have been difficult for the prophet of God to preserve his wonted calmness and serenity of soul—difficult for Elisha the man not to conquer and overcome Elisha the prophet. And yet the whole narrative is without excitement. There was great seriousness, great sorrow, but there was no passion. Finely says Andrew Fuller: "It is best when the sentence of condemnation is steeped in the judge's tears." It is a weeping Elisha that is dealing with the artful dissembler.

Let us here remark two things: first, the eminently gracious character of Elisha's dealing with Gehazi. One of the saddest sentences in the Bible is this:—"Ephraim," God's "dear son," God's "pleasant child," "is joined to his idols, let him alone." If there be another sentence in the Bible nearly as sad it is this:—"I say unto you that many shall come from the East, and from the West,

and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of heaven, but the children of the kingdom shall be thrust out." It was to prevent this, Elisha was delaying the stroke of doom on To think of him who had once been "enlightened," who had once "tasted of the heavenly gift," and who had now landed here—guilty of covetousness, untruthfulness, theft and hypocrisy, and who was still with brazen countenance and unrelenting, unrepenting heart carrying the deception out, after so significant a question as "Whence comest thou, Gehazi?"—it was a sad end for one who had been familiar with religious privileges and godly examples from his earliest years. In the New Testament Judas, the disciple of Christ, through covetousness, became "the traitor;" in the Old Testament, Gehazi, the disciple of Elisha, through covetousness, received a brand of infamy that will live as long as the records of inspiration. We do well to beware of the danger of religious privileges unimproved. It has been said that if the grave-digger, constantly surrounded with mementoes of dissolution is liable, just because habituated to the spectacle, to be least of all men impressed with the lessons of the grave, it is the spiritually privileged, those breathing a holy atmosphere, and moving in the circle of holy influence, who have greatest need to cherish remembrance of such Bible watchwords: "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he

fall;" "Hold up my goings in Thy paths that my footsteps slip not;" "By the grace of God I am what I am." "When I saw the end of Mr. Worldly Wiseman," writes John Bunyan, "then I knew there was a way to Hell, even from the gates of Heaven." "Truly," saith the preacher, in the Book of Proverbs, "the getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death."

This suggests the second remark, namely, the certainty, sooner or later, of the detection of every sin. How often we see even in the present life the great enemy of souls leaving his dupes in the lurch. It is a common remark that there is an "infatuation" connected with crime, that leaves a clue for its own discovery. "That which was done in secret is proclaimed upon the housetops." "The very birds of the air," as Solomon says, seem "to carry the message and tell the matter." now, many a deed of blood has been tracked by the crimson stains upon the snow, a bit of undestroyed handwriting, or "overdone" efforts at concealment. "The wicked saith in his heart, God hath forgotten, He hideth his face, He will never see it. Thou hast seen it, for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with Thy hand." "Be sure your sin will find you out." In the case of Elisha with Gehazi, there was of course the supernatural. During the whole of that flight after Naaman, the prophet's soul—to employ a fine com-

parison that has been used *—had been turned into a kind of camera obscura, and he saw with perfect clearness all that was going on—the leap from the chariot, the lading of the camp servants with the treasures, the deposit of them made at "the tower," as the rising ground sloped to his door, their secret hiding in the place of safety till the favourable moment came. Nay, more, Elisha through the same camera could see into Gehazi's heart. He read his thoughts. The rich festal garments he meant to sell for money to the first travelling caravan on its way to Egypt through Samaria, the silver he would invest in the purchase of some of the vineyards and oliveyards in the glens of Ephraim. Like the fool in the parable of our Blessed Lord, he had now " much goods laid up for many years," and he was going "to eat, drink, and be merry,"—the life of abstemiousness, and what he liked worse, the life of what he called sanctimoniousness, was now and for ever at an end.

Witness the discomfiture and dismay, as Elisha swept away all the castle-building. There came the solemn words: "Went not mine heart with thee when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments and olive yards, and vineyards and sheep and oxen, and men-servants

^{*} See "Scripture Characters," by Rev. Dr. Andrew Thomson, page 50.

and maid-servants?" The point of the question and rebuke lies in the expression: "Is it a time?" Iniquity, idolatry were abounding in the land. The love of many was "waxing cold." Elisha had been trying to build up. Gehazi was doing his best to pull down. What could be expected of the army, if one who was looked up to as a standard-bearer deserted his post, and went over to the enemy? If he—Gehazi—touched the ark with unhallowed hands, how many hundreds might be expected to follow his example? It was impossible for God at a moment like this to keep silence, and Gehazi must feel in a way he could never forget, that it was "a fearful thing" for the hypocrite, or any man in a mask, "to fall into the hands of the living God."

Let us consider Gehazi in his punishment. He had entered the house that day—that house he had done so much to dishonour, full of visions of earthly greatness: he left it as if smitten by an avenging angel. "The leprosy therefore of Naaman," said Elisha, "shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence, a leper as white as snow." Remark the immediate character of the punishment. "Sentence," we read, "against an evil work is not executed speedily." This sentence, however, was executed immediately. A Greek poet wrote—

[&]quot;Vengeance divine to punish sin moves slow, But the slower is its pace, the surer is its blow."

With Gehazi the blow was sure and sharp, ay, "sharp as a two-edged sword." The sin was so heinous—especially in a man like him, that it was to be marked with Heaven's highest, swiftest, and sorest displeasure, to show, like the somewhat kindred case of Ananias and Sapphira, that verily there was a God who judged in the earth.

Remark also that the punishment of Gehazi took its image from his sin. Covetousness had led him to trade on Naaman's recovery from his leprosy; he had gained Naaman's wealth, he must therefore take Naaman's leprosy along with it. Gehazi had made a very bad bargain. He might keep his money; but he had procured it at the expense of a life-long and loathsome disease, to be extended also to his children after him if he ever had any. I have read a story of an eagle that once swooped down from its eyrie in the lofty crag and stole a piece of meat from an altar of sacrifice, but carrying with the meat the live coal attached, she only succeeded in setting her nest on fire. Even so was it with Gehazi, as it has been with too many since, who in his spirit, have obtained riches, "but not by right." Sinfully acquired wealth carries within it its own curse. A leprosy attaches to the man whose sudden riches have been gained, say by scuttling the ship, where fathers and husbands have gone down to the bottom. I envy not the man who, by gambling in stocks and shares, or in "rigging the market," as it is termed, and upsetting all old

honest ways of gaining a living, finds himself suddenly the possessor of a fortune. God will punish that man before he leaves the world. What he has gained so suddenly he may lose as suddenly, as many have done. Even if it remain with him, it will prove a moral leprosy, a gangrene to his whole estate, like the ark among the Philistines, to which it has been compared, which was removed from Ashdod to Gath, and from Gath to Ekron, and troubled every one that kept it till it was returned to its rightful owners. Ten thousand times rather live on bread and water, and be honest, than "fare sumptuously every day," and bring self and children after, within the circle of the wealthy leper who first robs man and then robs God, and can expect nothing else but the blighting, withering judgment of Heaven.

What are true riches? Keep the eye on God, on the home above, on the wealth in eternity. By the gains of this world we must live; and "the hand of the diligent maketh rich." Surely, but the safeguard is this: beware of earthly treasures stealing away the heart from God. The dark passion of avarice has soiled many a noble spirit, and produced much blear-eyed religion in this world. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Amen.

LECTURE IX.

THE SIEGE OF SAMARIA-ELISHA THE PATRIOT.

"Carnage is terrible. The conversion of producers into destroyers is a calamity. Death, and insults to woman worse than death, human features obliterated beneath the hoof of the war-horse, reeking hospitals and ruined commerce, violated homes and broken hearts—they are all awful. Peace is blessed, peace arising out of charity. No one who loves his country, no one who knows what is meant by the sack of a town, can contemplate the possibility of such an event without a fervent hope that that day may never come. The enthusiasm of the platform is easy, and costs little."

REV. F. W. ROBERTSON, OF BRIGHTON.

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LECTURE IX.

THE SIEGE OF SAMARIA-ELISHA THE PATRIOT.

II. KINGS VI. 8 TO VII. 20.

"And it came to pass after this, that Ben-Hadad king of Syria, gathered all his host, and went up, and beseiged Samaria." &c.

N a rising ground above the river Foyle, a lofty pillar, with a statue on the top, commemorates the most memorable siege in the annals of the British isles. It lasted for 105 days, from April to July, 1689. Grain was doled

out by mouthfuls. Dogs, fattened on the blood of the slain, were luxuries few could afford to purchase. The hunger of the garrison was appeased by gnawing salted hides. Of a large stud of horses, only nine remained. The whole city was poisoned by the exhalations from the dead and dying.

That pillar, and the walls on which it stands, are to the Protestants of Ulster what the plains of Marathon and the pass of Thermopylæ were to the ancient Greeks in their best and palmiest days. The statue is that of a Christian minister, who, with the power of a second Elisha, sustained the fainting courage of his brethren through months of dire and terrible emergency: and no one who has ever seen it, as in his one hand the man of God grasps a Bible, and with the other directs the eyes of the famished population to the English top-masts headed by "The Mountjoy" in the distant bay—can think of George Walker and the siege of Derry, and the cause that was at stake during that awful period, without devout thanksgiving to God for one of the noblest illustrations of bravery and self-sacrifice in the history of the cause of Christ. "A people," says Lord Macaulay, "which takes no pride in the noble achievements of remote ancestors will never achieve anything worthy to be remembered with pride by remote descendants."

As with George Walker and the seige of Derry, the value of a good man to his country is strikingly shewn in the present long and deeply-interesting narrative. Elisha was the good man in Israel. "The holy seed," as in Isaiah's vision, was "the substance thereof." True piety is true patriotism. "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof:" the words

were as true of Elisha, as ever they were of his illustrious predecessor.

That the Lord is the hiding-place and shield of His servants, is also finely exhibited in God's protection of His prophet, when the marauding bands of Syria encompassed his dwelling. "The mountain," we read, "was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." There is substantial consolation here. We as Christian men and women have our enemies. Only, unlike Elisha's, they seek rather to fascinate than to terrify, to draw than to drive-pleasure, mammon, appetiteand hemmed in by such antagonistic forces, we cry out at times with Elisha's servant, "Alas! master, how shall we do?" "Fear not," says God, "He that is with you, is greater than all they that are against you." The good man, like Elisha, has a powerful body-guard. To the eye of sense he appears to be struggling against fearful odds. That eye can only see the enemy's gleaming and threatening weapons. The educated eye of faith, on the other hand, discerns the spiritual helpers, and chief of all, the constant presence of a covenant God: "Alone, and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me."

Take comfort then, believer, when you hear the cry: "The truth is in danger, the cause of Christ is in danger, we are in danger." Dothan may be encompassed, but the God of Elisha reigns. "Alas! master, how

shall we do?" is only the utterance of weak faith. Master is identified with us. The battle is not against us, it is against Him. The student of history knows well that the would-be persecutors of God's Elishas have often themselves been the first victims. That host of Syria went to capture the prophet: they found themselves captives in the citadel of Israel. The same God who opened the eyes of Elisha's servant, closed for the time the eyes of these Syrian guerillas, spread the film of delusion and mental hallucination over them the correct meaning of the expression, "smitten with blindness," for it was not total and material blindness—and when that was removed, gave them to see in their spared lives, (when Jehoram wished to put them to death,) the gracious and long suffering character even of the God of the Old Testament: " set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master." A moral conquest had been gained over Syria. whole narrative is a touching evidence of how safe God's children are in their Heavenly Father's hand, and how, when men have their eyes "opened" to know God, they find Him no austere taskmaster, but merciful to "the chief of sinners," and willing to save "even to the uttermost."

We come now to the siege of Samaria. The cure and conversion of Naaman, and the sparing of the lives of the guerilla band already noticed, had no lasting or

permanent effect on Israel's ancient enemies. For a time there was peace, but the restless ambition of king Ben-Hadad renewed the warfare on a new and deadlier scale. . "Had the people any quarrel?" asks Thomas Carlyle, speaking of another subject. "Busy as the devil is, not the smallest. They lived apart, nay, in so wide a universe, there was even unconsciously by commerce, some mutual helpfulness between them. How then? Their governors had fallen out, and instead of shooting one another, had the cunning to make their people shoot." "The greatest curse," said Sydney Smith in a sermon preached by him as Dean of St. Paul's, on the accession of Queen Victoria, "which can be entailed on mankind is a state of war. All the atrocious crimes committed in years of peace, all that is spent in peace by the secret corruptions or by the thoughtless extravagance of nations, are mere trifles compared with the gigantic evils which stalk over the world in a state of God is forgotten in war, every principle of war. Christian charity trampled upon, human labour destroyed, human industry extinguished; you see the son, and the husband, and the brother, dying miserably in distant lands; you see the waste of human affections, you see the breaking of human hearts, you hear the shrieks of the widows and children after the battle, and you walk over the mangled bodies of the wounded calling for death. I would say to that Royal Lady there, worship

God by loving peace." The thirst for war is but the proof and the picture of the old abiding enmity between "the seed of the woman" and "the seed of the serpent." The prince of this world is the avowed, the persistent enemy of the kingdom of Christ.

From the mountain passes of Syria the disciplined troops of Ben-Hadad poured down, till they reached the gates of Samaria, the royal city of King Jehoram. No preparation had been made to meet the danger. capital was badly garrisoned, it was ill provisioned, disorder and discord—to a large extent the result of broken unity of faith—reigned on all sides within. Remembering the siege of Paris in 1870, or, the more terrible siege we noticed at the outset, we may form some faint idea of the siege of Samaria. But of scarcely any siege in the whole history of the world as narrated by the historian's pen, do we read such horrors as are recorded here. Famine was added to the terrors of an enemy at the gate. Pale hunger looked in at every lattice, and in the wake of hunger came pestilence and The most repulsive part of an unclean animal the head of an ass—sold for a sum equivalent to five guineas in British money; and half-a-pint of the meanest vegetable—a kind of pulse—for a sum equivalent to twelve shillings and sixpence. It is impossible not to trace back the sufferings of the guilty people to a violated covenant, and the enthronement of idol-worship

in the land of Israel before the very eyes of a jealous God. The refuse of what is best, is worst, the proverb tells us; and the abominations wrought in Samaria in "the groves" and "high places" consecrated to Baal, only shew that when a nation thought worthy to be the bearer of the revelation and knowledge of the one living God proves faithless to its trust, there is no depth too great to which it may not descend.

The weary days of siege were passing, and the king made his way to the city wall to encourage, if he could, his wan and dying soldiery. The heart sickens at the tale he heard—a tale unexampled on the crimson page of war, save in the one partial parallel in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem, when a woman slew her child to sustain her own life, and Titus, the Roman general, witnessing the deed, vowed that the sun should no longer shine on a city in which, as he said, "mothers nourished themselves with such food"—and true to his word, he razed it to the ground.

We cannot dwell on the details of the inhuman bargain, and savage, nay fiendish, meal which the narrative records. The wild glare of these eyes—recalling to the mind the well-known terrible painting of a somewhat similar character in the Wiertz Gallery at Brussels—as the one mother complains to the king that the other mother who had helped her in her crime, was now deserting her, as if her guilt could have been less had it been

shared by another, or her misery lighter though another divided the weight-plainly proves that there was the madness of hunger here, the insanity of starvation, destroying both the common instincts and the common likeness of human nature. This verdict of charity is confirmed by the fact that the one mother could relate in the most deliberate manner every minute circumstance, and tell how that between them they had killed and sodden, and eaten her son, and thereafter could make the appeal for even-handed justice. Imagination refuses to picture the scene: and indeed no word-painting in the world could equal the awfully graphic and bloodfreezing impersonation of the text. No wonder King Jehoram rent his clothes and staggered at the recital of the tragedy. The blame was largely his own. He it was who had led the people astray, and brought down on their heads this retribution from Heaven. He had set his people the example of dethroning God, and when a man or a nation comes to this, there is no extremity of evil impossible. They have flung themselves into the middle of a torrent, where the impetuosity of the stream itself will hurry them along, till they "shoot the rapids" altogether, as so many thousands have done, and perish "without God and therefore without hope in the world."

It is worthy of remark, however, that when Jehoram rent his royal robe, the people noticed he wore beneath it a penitential under-dress of hair cloth. Next to his very

body it was worn, to betoken the depth of the king's mental and spiritual distress. What shall we say of this? If a rebellious and impenitent heart beats below, this garment of penitence is of no avail whatever in the sight of God. It is the grossest superstition and a most dangerous mistake to imagine that we can make satisfaction for our sins, become reconciled to God, or turn aside His holy and righteous indignation by mere external acts the wearing of sackcloth, the repetition of prayers, fastings, penances, self-chastisements, or self-mutilations. "The just shall live by faith;" and if we needed any further evidence that Jehoram, while horror-struck with the results of sin, was in no way conscience-stricken with the sin itself, that his professed penitence and humiliation in place of being that "godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto life," was only "the sorrow of the world which worketh death"—we have it here, that the moment after he had rent his royal mantle he vowed to take Elisha's life, as the author of the present calamities. "God do so and more also to me if the head of Elisha. the son of Shaphat, shall stand on him this day." Incredible, inconceivable, yet strictly true—King Jehoram wearing his coarse and prickly hair cloth by way of repentance for national sin, profanes the name of God, calls down His curse upon His prophet, and proclaims his intention of carrying into execution his purposes of blood, that very day. Who fails to read the lessons?

Outward devoteeism and true change of heart are two different things: external religiousness and having the springs of the inner life influenced daily by the grace of God are by no means coexistent and inseparable. Oh! it is easy to wear the garments of sackcloth, yes, even to self-chastisement; it is the hardest and most difficult work in this world to be a meek, and humble, and consistent Christian. "Who is sufficient for these things?" And yet—"Our sufficiency is of God." "My strength shall be made perfect in thy weakness." "Ask and ye shall receive."

How the sin of men is ever their folly! The one hope of Samaria, under God, lay in Elisha, and Jehoram had sworn a solemn oath to take his life. The man of God was at that moment holding what we understand by a prayer-meeting in his house in Samaria,—he and the elders of the city in the school of the prophets. midst of the religious exercises, the messenger from the rash king arrives to despatch Elisha. What contrast could be greater? "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard:" and there, at the very hour of prayer, when these praying hearts are entreating the Lord to stay His judgments, and return in mercy to His land and people, they are to be interrupted and broken in upon by a message of doom. With his divine second sight, however, Elisha has seen and knows it all. He has heard Jehoram's words. He has watched the messenger commissioned. He is fully aware of the errand on which he comes. He rises from his knees. "Shut the door," he says to the elders, the magistrates of the city—"detain the executioner; hold him fast; the weak and vacillating Jehoram will soon regret his language and rue his oath. Is not the sound of his master's feet' already behind the doomsman?" Full well the prophet knew that cruelty and cowardice often go together. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth:" it is only "the righteous" who are "bold as a lion."

It was true enough that Jehoram followed his messenger. He found him fast at the prophet's door in the custody of the authorities of the city. He broke into the presence of Elisha, but it was not now to put him to death. He acknowledged his great sin. This evil was "of the Lord:" he could deny it no longer, but what then? Was he going to humble himself and seek godly repentance? Was his desire to return to Jehovah the God of Israel, like an obedient child, after this severe punishment? No; he proclaims his infidelity in the very ear of the prophet: "Why should I wait for Jehovah any The language is not unheard still. "God," says one, "sends upon me calamity after calamity. How can I believe that God is love? Is it strange that my faith deserts me, and that I can no longer hope or believe in God? The blinding snowdrift is around methe keen cutting wind of adversity—and the night of deepest and darkest sorrow is closing in; I shall fling myself down in despair, and I shall die; 'why should I wait for Jehovah any longer?"

How little we know of God's hidden purposes: infinitely more gracious than—I shall not say Jehoram—but "Weeping may endure than any one of us deserves. for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." ye the word of the Lord," said Elisha, "Thus saith the Lord, to-morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel and two measures of barley for a shekel in the gate of Samaria." That was to say, that the very next day in this city of famine and siege, a peck of flour would be sold for what we call half-acrown, and two pecks of barley for the same money. The impossibilities are the chosen province of our God. The resurrection is impossible, cries unbelief, and the incarnation and salvation through an act of faith. Pause a moment. Is it not true that many things which appeared impossible one hundred years ago are now matters of fact and familiar experience? Be cautious therefore, unbeliever, with your proclamation of impossibilities even in things of the present life, and if so, how much more with that God to whom the seen and the unseen, the possible and the impossible, the near and the most remote, are all alike.

There was scepticism even in the besieged city of

"If the Lord would make windows in Samaria. heaven," said one of the king's courtiers with a sneer, "might this thing be?" This was spoken by a representative materialist. The words contain the irony of an unspiritually minded man. This lord of Samaria, while the people were perishing from starvation, could find heart and time for a coarse jest. "Ah!" he says, " is the Lord going to open the windows of heaven, and rain meal and barley down?" It was a bad sign of Jehoram that he had a man like this in his court, even as it is always a bad sign of either prince, king, or ordinary simple citizen when scoffers form their most intimate friends. The reply of Elisha has its solemn side for us all: "Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof."

This is to be the end of every scoffer. Unbelief is self-robbery and self-destruction. The unbeliever points the poniard at his own heart. On that day, that great day of marvellous revelations at the throne of God, the scoffer shall "see" the glory of heaven's fadeless, everblooming tree of life with his eyes, but "he shall not eat thereof." He made his choice. He has himself to blame. There is no folly in the world like infidelity. What though like this courtier of Jehoram, it be highborn and well-bred: be mine the birth and breeding of Cowper's Cottager, or the exiled Puritans, whose palace was the house eternal in the heavens, who were "kings"

by the right of a nobler creation, and priests by the imposition of a mightier hand."*

The story of the sudden raising of the siege of Samaria is one of the most graphic narratives in the Old Testa-The introduction also of the four lepers is a fine illustration of the fact that no man in this world need say he is an outcast, or that he can do nothing for God The prominence still further which these four or man. lepers receive in the story, is in the same line of God's providential arrangements, as fishermen and publicans being the first preachers of the Gospel, God choosing "the foolish things of this world to confound the wise," the most unlikely and out-of-the-way instrumentalities, to accomplish His great designs. The panic of the Syrian army was no doubt brought about by natural That God to whom belong the shades of night, the winds rustling among the leaves, and the echoes among the hills leaping from crag to crag, could easily employ means such as these to spread terror and dismay among the superstitious hosts of Syria. Their indefinite fears soon took definite shape. Afraid of a threefold attack, they fled in the fast-gathering darkness, nay, "left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life." No wicked man is so bold but he may well tremble and flee if

^{*} Macaulay's Essay on Milton.

pursued by nothing else like these Syrians except his own thoughts.

Remark, however, at this point the miraculous interference in behalf of Samaria. Gold, silver, the stores of the commissariat, all were left behind. Without chariots or horses, without arms or army, by simple terror alone, the enemy had been put to flight, and now God's captives could be set at liberty, the hungry fed, the poor made rich, and Elisha's singular prediction fulfilled to the very letter. The first to discover it, I have said, were the four lepers—"the base things of the world, and the things which were despised "-banished even at a time of siege outside the city. The lepers reasoned well. Death was before them anyhow; but there might be mercy in the Syrian heart for them—they would try. In the fading twilight they reached the camp. They saw the watch-fires burning. They heard the neighing of horses. They even entered what must have been an officer's tent. "Behold," is the simple language of the narrative, "there was no man there." On the rude camp table lay the evening meal; it was untouched. The lepers waited; they listened. The camp was unusually still. They passed along the white rows of tents; there was no sound, no sign. Surely, they said, the army must be in deep slumber. They reached "the very uttermost part of the camp," and even here, saving the camp-horses, and asses, and litter mules—the beasts

of burden—they were unable to find a single tenant. We cannot wonder that now, in the artless words of the passage, "they sat down to eat and drink"—the wonder rather is, that the famished men had patience and prudence to wait so long. I have no call to justify their appropriation of the treasures, but surely it was sound religious patriotism that spoke such words as these concerning those who had cast them out as lepers from their society and almost from their city: "We do not well; this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace; if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us; now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household."

Noble words in the circumstances, and full of precious Gospel truth. "This day" of the Gospel is surely "a day of good tidings" to every leprous soul; and God's gift of the Gospel is to be diffused, and not to be monopolised. No more than these lepers are we to "hold our peace." The Fatherhood of God involves the brotherhood of man. In the fine couplet of J. R. Lowell, one of the poets of America:

Christ has left the work of evangelising the world to us who already know the truth, and a noble missionary sermon might be preached from these words—at least

[&]quot;Tis ours to save our brethren, with peace and love, to win Their darkened hearts from error, ere they harden them to sin."

they form a very noble text—"This day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace; if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us; now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household." Serious mischief will come upon us, if we, who know the truth, do nothing to spread it; and if, when the Master at the close of the day asks us to give in the statement of our time and our work, we can only hang our heads as the rebuke sweeps over them: "Why have ye stood here all the day idle?" What kind of Christianity will that be with which to go to the judgment-seat of Christ? God grant that none of us may be content with a starless crown. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

It was far on in the night when the four lepers returned to the gate of Samaria. Calling the soldier on duty, they made their astounding communication; he sent it on to the other guards, and by and by it reached the palace. There were many footsteps running up and down. And these in turn brought many watchers to the lattice to enquire the meaning of so unusual a commotion. The unbelieving Jehoram alone saw mischief—deep-laid Syrian strategy—in the deliverance, justifying

and illustrating the far-seeing Bible words, with their subtle analysis of human character: "Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord." Well it was for Jehoram and the famine-stricken city that in the midnight council a wiser voice prevailed, though it reasoned only wth the logic of despair. The forlorn hope—in the shape of the two war chariots and charioteers-drove off. A thousand eyes watched them in the early morning light, as they moved swiftly through the zig-zag of Syrian tents that dotted the plain of Samaria. Enough was seen upon the road to satisfy even sceptical Jehoram that the panic was true. Weapons of war, articles of clothing, the very camp vessels which were used in the preparation of food, had all been flung away. The charioteers drew rein. From the fords of Jordan they swept back to Samaria. The postern-gates flew open. The population were in the streets. "Welcome!" they cried, "welcome, messengers of liberty and peace." The enemy had fled.

"Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy; to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. Our soul waiteth for the Lord, He is our help and our shield. For our heart shall re-

joice in Him, because we have trusted in His holy name."

"Now Israel may say and that truly,
If that the Lord had not our cause maintain'd:
If that the Lord had not our right sustain'd,
When cruel men against us furiously
Rose up in wrath, to make of us their prey.

Ev'n as a bird out of the fowler's snare
Escapes away, so is our soul set free;
Broke are their nets, and thus escaped we.
Therefore our help is in the Lord's great name,
Who heav'n and earth by His great pow'r did frame."

That morning in the gate of Samaria a cry was heard among the famished multitudes, "A measure of fine flour for a shekel," and "two measures of barley for a shekel." The governor, as the people were frenzied with joy—unrestrained and unrestrainable—endeavoured to enforce order and obedience by his presence. Whether purposely or by accident, we cannot tell, there was a crowd and a confusion. The voice that spoke was stifled in the wild delirium of the hour. When the tumult ceased and the last of the heavy-laden carts that carried the spoil into Samaria from the Syrian tents passed in, it was found there was a corpse. They took it up, and lo! it was that of the jeering courtier, who only the day before had asked if God was going "to open a window in Heaven and rain meal and barley down." A window in

Heaven had closed—closed against him, and behind it who can fail to see the finger of God lifted in warning, and hear a voice that says: "Be not deceived, God is not mocked;" "For every idle word that men speak they shall give account to God:" "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap;" "Set a watch on the door of my lips." Amen.

LECTURE X.

BEN-HADAD AND HAZAEL-ELISHA IN TEAR\$.

"O Hazael, how much better had it been for thee never to have known the name or honour of a king, than to have purchased it at the expense of so much guilt, forfeiting thy first and best character, rushing into crimes which were once thine abhorrence, and becoming a traitor to the native sentiments and dictates of thy heart. How fatal to thy repose proved that coveted purple, which was drenched by thee in so much innocent blood! How much more cheerful were thy days, and how much calmer thy nights in the former periods of thy life, than when placed on a throne, thy ears were invaded by day with the cries of the miserable whom thou hadst ruined, and thy slumbers broken by night with the shocking remembrance of thy cruelties and crimes."

REV. DR. HUGH BLAIR.

LECTURE X.

BEN-HADAD AND HAZAEL-ELISHA IN TEARS.

II. Kings viii. 7—15.

" And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" &c.

HE cure of Naaman the Syrian was long remembered in Damascus. It is not surprising, therefore, that Ben-Hadad the king, although an idolator—finding himself in the grasp of a disease that threatened his life—

should have been anxious to consult the prophet Elisha. Hazael, one of the princes of the court, was sent on the embassy to the man of God. The answer of the prophet was ambiguous. So far as the disease itself was concerned, the king might recover; but the purpose to kill him was already in the heart of his very commissioner. Fixing his eye on Hazael, Elisha tells him he sees his?

long future course of cruelty, tyranny, and dire destruction. The man of God bursts into a flood of tears. The fairest lands and cities of Israel, Hazael would utterly destroy. The hope of Israel—her young men—would be ruthlessly slain. And there were other nameless and almost incredible barbarities. The courtier is rooted to the earth with horror. He repudiates the image of the prophetic mirror. At the thought of such crimes, he recoils from his own future self. "Is thy servant a dog?" he exclaims in indignation, "to commit such a mass of iniquities?" Elisha makes no reply, save this: he would be soon king of Syria, and then he left Hazael to infer the rest.

The very day after, the prince was accessory to the sovereign's death. Ben-Hadad might have recovered, but in sad justification of Elisha's tears, Hazael was guilty of the atrocity of the text, and in due season (II. Kings xiii. 22) proved himself, as king of Syria, a man of most persistent wickedness: "He oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz." The whole narrative is full of instruction of the most serious character, in relation to the stealthy yet swift aggression of criminal impulse, seducing and transforming its victims:

"Till creatures born,
For good (whose hearts kind Pity nursed)
Will act the direst crimes they cursed
But yester-morn."

"Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

I. Let me remark, to a heart not wholly corrupted, such self-repudiation as this of Hazael is natural.

Are we to look on this Syrian prince, as he stands in the presence of Elisha, merely as a hypocrite? I think I believe his recoil from his future guilt, as here narrated, was perfectly genuine. I believe that when he uttered the words, "Is thy servant a dog?" he was quite unable to realise that he could ever be the author of the crimes predicted. The story, therefore, is true to Suppose Cain had been told he would one day lift his club against his brother and fell him to the ground, would he not have said, and said with quite as much passionate feeling as Hazael, "Is thy servant a dog?" Would Joseph's brethren not have said the same at one period, at the bare conception of ever selling their brother, even though he was their father's favourite (and as they considered his greatly indulged) son, for a slave? Can we doubt that David would have uttered the same language, had any one predicted his conduct in the matter of Uriah? I believe the time was when Judas even would have started back, in deprecating protest and shuddering terror, asking in relation to the awful crime he afterwards committed, " Is thy servant a dog?" This is only the voice of human nature, not yet

hardened in iniquity. When no passion blinds him and no interest warps the feelings of his heart, the most ignorant and untutored man will often revolt from sin and crime. This is a ray still lingering of the Divine light that once shone clear and strong in the soul of man, and which although now sadly obscured, sends its gleams and glimmerings athwart the darkness. Robespierre was once a very tender-hearted man. There are those to-day in Portland hulks and Dartmoor prison who had hearts as fresh, and loving, and gentle, and untarnished, as any among ourselves. That drunkard was once a little Sunday scholar, the pride of all who knew or taught him from the Book of God. That prisoner standing at the bar of her country's justice, for putting the poisoned chalice to her lover's lips, was once an innocent little girl—the joy, the delight, the sunbeam of her home. Thanks be to God, there is a real nobility in even fallen human nature. Our souls, our consciences, tell us we would be "dogs" if we "could do" such things. The edge of natural aversion to crimes of treachery, and cruelty, and oppression is sharp, before the point has been reached where the momentum given prevents the power of stopping—by which I mean not that a man must ever of necessity be the creature of his surroundings—which would be pure fatalism—but where a frail, weak, temptable man has forgotten to ask the grace of God which is promised to help him to rise above his worst surroundings, and come out more than conqueror. Yet remark—

II. Although to a heart not wholly corrupted, such self-repudiation as this of Hazael is natural, man's ignorance of his own character is such that he may one day be guilty of the very sins which for the present he believes to be impossible. Hazael went back to the palace of King Ben-Hadad. He delivered the prophet's message to the king that there was nothing mortal in his disease and that he would recover. The very next day he went up to the royal bed. He lifted the thick quilt of wool. He steeped it in water. With its great weight it was a fit instrument for accomplishing his purpose, without leaving any marks of violence. choked the king with the coverlet, as the little English princes were stifled with the pillows in the Tower, " he spread the quilt," we read, " on the face of the king, so that he died; and Hazael reigned in his stead."

Elisha was right; Hazael was wrong. He did not know his own heart. "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee." We know who said that. Christ knew Peter better than Peter knew himself. "Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice." Now, Hazael could never say he had not been warned. He had gone to Elisha. He had undertaken his master's commission; in fact, he had outdone it. The showy

features of oriental character come out in this man. He takes a procession with him to the prophet of forty loaded camels' burden—conveying "a present of every good thing in Damascus." In weight alone this would have amounted to thirty thousand pounds. We cannot imagine this was what Hazael offered to a poor solitary prophet. I rather think he wished to make a great display. Accordingly he distributed over forty camels what one or two could have carried easily. His object was twofold; to impose on Elisha, to mislead the people of Damascus also, as to his designs upon the crown. I have said Hazael was not altogether a hypocrite, at the same time it is impossible to deny he had entered on a course of evil of which he did not see the end.

When the prophet pronounced the words, "Go, say unto Ben-Hadad, thou mayest certainly recover," he gave the ambitious guilty prince one opportunity of repentance. When the prophet "settled his countenance steadfastly until Hazael was ashamed," he gave him a second. Elisha could not think of that soul of his rushing to ruin, without at least an attempt at rescue. He fixed his eyes on him. He told him by his looks that he could read his inmost thoughts. Hazael quailed; blushes—long strangers perhaps to his cheeks and brow—crimsoned his face: he had still a kind of conscience left, and though he lulled it to sleep, Elisha woke it up. A third opportunity even of repentance Elisha gave to

"The man of God wept." How it reminds us of the greater than Elisha, who, "when He beheld the city, He wept over it." But the master-passion was there. Probably Hazael himself had never known the strength of it. There was the shudder, as Elisha the limner shewed him his picture in the glass. The swift deed of blood, however, shewed how transient it was. "Am I a dog?" he cried, and in less than four-andtwenty hours Hazael stood there in Damascus, as he still stands on the page of the Bible, one of the most melancholy illustrations of the degrading power of guilt the rapidity with which a man can accomplish his own destruction, according to the proverb, "Facilis est descensus"—an awful warning in black letter type, or red letter type, if you will, of the end of all criminal policy and unholy unsanctified ambition.

Let us pause here and gather up a few solemn lessons for ourselves. First of all, let us beware of what is evil in its first beginnings. There is a rock. How was it formed? Once it was loose sand and dust, blown about by every wind. It is solid now, and you can see in it the print of a foot, the skeleton of a fish, or it may be, as science tells us, the ripple-mark left by the wave, or the leaf, even the mark of the raindrop as it fell ages ago. That solid, fossilised rock is only the result of successive accretions of loose sand; and a character like Hazael's is only the result of the action and power of

principles of evil permitted to grow up and develop in the soul, without hindrance or check. "Take us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes." Life nowhere grows by freaks. That infant needs pure air and nourishing food. Even so with every malign influence and wicked way; feed them and they will grow.

Once again. Let us beware of what is evil in its propelling power. Hazael went quickly to ruin. It is the story of many a prodigal. "Not many days after, he took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance in riotous living." Let us take present day illustrations. He went to the race-course, let me say. He laid wagers on horses. He began "to keep a book"—as it is called—or he had dealings with those who did. Sometimes he gained, but one day he lost heavily, and to keep things straight he signed his master's name to a cheque, or he cleverly cooked an account, or did something else to avoid detection and disgrace, at which, in his far happier days of innocence and ignorance of betting, he would have exclaimed with Hazael, and far more sincerely: "Is thy servant a dog?" I have seen it. I know it; and I have before me at this moment the recollection of one of the finest and most open-hearted young men I ever knew, whom this gambling on the turf, and "keeping a book"—a pretty kind of book to keep—sent to destruction. I utter the warning voice.

I am old-fashioned enough to believe in the Bible, not professionally merely but as a citizen and a parent, and like the man of God in this passage, I could "weep" hot burning tears for any that I loved and who ever sat under my ministry, if I thought that in this or in other kindred evil paths, they were going astray. There is a downward path in evil; and sapping the constitution, softening the brain, shattering the nerves, bringing the prodigal to poverty and want, ay, filling a dishonoured grave is by no means the worst of it. It is terrible to see the prodigal selling his father's family Bible to get a few shillings to spend on vice, terrible to see him pledging the keepsakes of early love, to do which at one time would have been sacrilege in his eyes, and made him say with Hazael, only with tenfold greater power, "Is thy servant a dog?" May God in His infinite mercy keep us all from secret sins—for, however we may regard them with the lens of apologetic ingenuity, the eye of God sees them as they are, and judges of them as they are; and there is no greater truth in the world than the familiar—perhaps too familiar—words contain: "Be sure your sin will find you out."

III. I am willing, however, to admit that a change of circumstances and condition may, in a very real sense, have an important power over human character and life. I do not believe that man is the creature of circumstances, that it is circumstances that make men, and

that the only difference between the noblest saint and the basest criminal is a difference simply in the structure of the brain, and the nature of their position in life. I do not believe this, and I cannot see how any man can believe it. At the same time, circumstances have often a real influence on human character. Had Hazael never been flattered by Ben-Hadad—for in the opinion of many he supplanted Naaman—had he never been brought within the circle of a court, the unsanctified ambition might never have possessed him to seize a crown; and had he not seized the crown—holding the royal stirrup, so to speak, the very moment he was grasping the royal sceptre—he would never have been the man of blood he afterwards became. Our experience of life must be narrow indeed, if we cannot recall kindred illustrations. Take Robert Burns:

"Oh! had he stayed by bonnie Doon,
And learned to curb his passions wild,
We had not mourned his early fate,
Nor pity wept o'er Nature's child."

Southey, speaking of the first Napoleon, has this remark: "He had given indications of his military talents at Toulon; he had also shewn a little of a remorseless nature at Paris in his earlier years; but the extent either of his ability or his wickedness was at this time known to none, and perhaps not even suspected by himself." New circumstances bring new temptations.

That lad, brought up in the quiet of the country, enters on a city life. In a few years the old habits, in fact the very old ways of thinking and looking at things, are all changed. For the better? Not always, I fear. becomes liberalised and expanded—quite true—and the expansion sometimes breaks the barriers altogether. take that beloved girl. She is passing from youth to womanhood. She is about to enter a new world, peopled with inhabitants she never saw before, or if she did, only in dim and indistinct outline—as trees walking. We all know that to be a critical period. Now, there are two courses that can be followed: first, leaving her to herself, without guidance, or permitting her, if you will, to take her own way, to learn her new world by discovery, and perhaps at times on the very edge and brink of danger; or, secondly, oversight that shall be liberal and loving, but which shall yet hold invisible reins, and be careful how the area of pleasures, in particular, is extended, and the circle of companionships enlarged. Take the first way of it. By and by there comes a tragedy, and censure is severe, and yet we exposed her to these temptations, and we complain of the result. I do not defend the censure. Men hear of the sins of another, and flatter themselves on their supe-Let conscience utter its voice. In similar circumstances you might have done the same.

say with Hazael, "Is thy servant a dog?" No, thy servant is not "a dog;" but thy servant is a poor, weak, son or daughter of Adam, and if you turn Pharisee and begin to boast that you are holier or truer than your brother or sister, it is my duty to tell you to take good care what you are about yourself. It seems harsh, unjust, ungenerous, untrue; but I quote what one commentator, writing on this subject, says: " Much of what passes for virtue in the world, may simply be the opposite not manifested by circumstances." Does the rich man know the temptations of the poor man, struggling honestly every day to keep the wolf from the door? Does the poor man, protected by his very poverty, know the temptations (especially, like Hazael, the temptations to ambition), in the case of those who have acquired, or who have been nursed in the lap of wealth? There is great truth in the proverb that "the one half of the world does not know how the other half lives;" and if so, the one half of the world should be extremely careful how they become the other half's judges. Oh! for more charity, and more of the spirit of Him who could say to one who, probably more than anything else, was a victim of circumstances—" Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more." I would warn the sinner with earnestness. amounting even to holy indignation at his sins; but I would seek to "speak the truth in love," remembering and saying with St. Paul, "I myself also am a man." Depend upon it, Paul's spirit in the sight of God, is the only true spirit for us all.

Frequently when in London, I dare say we all pass under the gloomy walls of Newgate. I cannot help sometimes thinking of the inmates. What a contrast to the city roar across the Holborn Viaduct, and the awful silence that reigns yonder behind. Suppose in fancy we enter by the heavy creaking doors. Here are (or were till removal elsewhere) men who were once bankers, doctors, lawyers, members of Parliament, merchants, preachers of the Gospel.* They were once as we are this morning. They had those that loved them as we have. Some ears there were that heard no music like the sound of their voice, none like the footfall on the threshold that announced their coming home. They trifled with con-They yielded to circumstances. They sinned. science. " A heavy price must all pay who thus err." Society rose against them. Society put them there. What then? Are they in Hazael's language, "dogs?" The repentance of many of them, I believe, is deep and genuine. They never doubted or denied the need of Divine strength and God's grace, only they did not seek them till it was In an evil hour they yielded; they fell; too late.

^{*} See "Five Years' Penal Servitude," By One who has Endured It. Page 139.

"and great was the fall thereof." What is the lesson for us?

Be gentle in your judgments upon others; be severe, most severe, in your judgments upon yourself. apologist for no man who tampers with truth, or temporises with sin, still less for any one who places himself wilfully on an inclined plane, and with his eyes open, rolls down to the bottom. And yet there is a parable of the Master which is very dear to my heart. The piece of silver which the woman lost might have fallen in the mire and been covered with mud. It might have been scratched on some part of the face or rim. But when she found it, and wiped it, and made it ring on the table, she found it was true metal. Who knows but over many a soiled, battered, weather-beaten, and-in the opinion of a world that is harder in its judgments than Jesus Christ—many an apparently hopelessly damaged life here, He, that blessed Saviour who died for us all, may not say hereafter, like the woman when she called her friends and her neighbours together: "Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost i"

> "And the angels echoed around the throne, Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own."

> > Amen.

LECTURE XI.

THE SYMBOL OF THE BOW AND ARROWS-ELISHA THE DYING PROPHET.

"So live, that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan, that moves
To the pale realms of shade, where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Thou go not like the quarry slave at night
Scourged to his dungeon, but sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams."

BRYANT.

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LECTURE XI.

THE SYMBOL OF THE BOW AND ARROWS— ELISHA THE DYING PROPHET.

II. Kings xIII. 14-20.

"Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died, and Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, 'O, my father, my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof.' And Elisha said unto him, 'Take bow and arrows.' And he took unto him bow and arrows."

ETWEEN the subject of our last lecture and the subject of the present there was an interval of forty-five years. Elisha was now eighty-three years old—the recently issued volume of *The Speaker's Commentary* says

he was probably ninety. The Scripture record is silent as to the life-work of Elisha embraced within that period of nearly half a century, but we can all imagine what it was. "Happy is the kingdom," it has been said, "that

has no annals:" still happier the ministry, let us add, that writes its history in silence and secresy on human souls. What is success in the work of God? Only what appears on the surface: only what we see with our eyes? God forbid. We are thankful for what we see. We bless God for visible results. But who can gauge the results that are never seen, and that will never be seen till the startling and full manifestation of the Great Day? I believe the unseen results to be the greatest results. Sometimes there are surprises for faithful Elishas in this world; there will be infinitely more and infinitely greater surprises when, as in the missionary story, some happy saint in heaven who has gone before, takes his old minister, or Sunday-school teacher by the hand as he passes in at the gate of heaven, and leading him to the throne of God, says, amid the only tears that can ever be known at the Father's right hand: "This was the man, this was the woman that first led me to Jesus."

Joash was a young but he was a wicked king; "he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord:" "he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, but walked therein:"he maintained idolatry in the land, and thus prevented Israel returning in simple allegiance to God. The death-bed of Elisha, therefore, was the last place in the world where one would have looked for Joash: it was a noble testimony, however, to the unrecorded, unosten-

tatious, quiet, simple-minded, ministerial work of Elisha, and another comforting, encouraging evidence to the hearts of all Christian workers to go on spending and being spent for God. The seed is growing secretly whether we see the harvest or no.

It is often a very instructive thing to notice the different kinds of persons who will follow a good man to his grave. What brought King Joash to Elisha's dying bed? Two things, I think. First of all, what brings many a wicked man at times to take counsel with, and seek consolation from, the servants of God in trial and distress. Syria was at her old work, and pressing Israel sore, and Elisha, the one hope of Israel, under God, was going away. Joash would seek the prophet himself, to see if nothing could be done for his kingdom, "before the chariot of Israel and the horseman thereof," was seen no more in her midst. Then, again, the voice of conscience brought Joash to Elisha. He had long disregarded him even from his boyhood upwards. He had been for some fifty years in Israel the messenger of God to kings and people; but Joash, like his predecessors, had gone after false gods, and never sought "the prophet that was in Samaria," except in the time of extremity.

[&]quot; How blessings brighten as they take their flight."

[&]quot;Bring me up Samuel," cried poor, deluded, tormented, Saul to the witch in the cave of Endor. Ah! these

recollections of departed Samuels and Elishas, how they pierce the souls of ungodly men in the hour of the felt blank and the spiritual awakening, like "a two-edged sword!" When the mother was beneath the sod—the mother he had done nothing but illuse during life—I have seen the son weep bitter burning tears of sorrow and remorse. I remember at least one deathbed, where one, of whom I shall be dumb, seemed in the moments of interval between his drunken deliriums. to be going back to the church he sat in when a boy, and the minister of religion under whom he had been brought up, but whose heart he never cheered by seeking "the narrow way that leadeth unto life." When Moses was dead, he was missed and mourned for, even "many days," by the very people who not once but often could have stoned him or otherwise taken his life. Even so Joash, the idolatrous King of Israel, the moment he hears of the aged Elisha's critical illness, orders out his royal chariot, leaves his palace and court, and goes down to Samaria to "the little chamber on the wall, with the bed, and the table, and the stool, and the candlestick," where, according to tradition, the son of the Shunammite woman—the boy he had brought back to life-still waited on Elisha with loving care.

There are three sights in that chamber, and each has its own lesson—the expiring prophet; the weeping king: and the son of the Shunammite, a middle-aged

man now, whom (it may have been from that very bed on which he lies) Elisha restored to his mother. I am most concerned, however, with that king for the present. Tears had long been strangers to his eyes, especially tears for departing piety. It was that old man, lying there on that humble couch, worn out with age and disease, that was the real monarch of Israel. Joash knew it; felt it; confessed it, as the tears came fast, and he cried as he hung over the dying saint—" the holy man of God who had been passing by continually" all these fifty years in Israel—"O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." Why was Elisha, the old prophet, to be visited with this "sore sickness whereof he died?" He did more good to Joash from that sick-bed, than ever he had done during all his previous active and busy life. If Joash had never heard a sermon from Elisha before, he both saw and heard one in that sick-room now- ay, one of the noblest and most practical sermons the prophet ever preached. thank God for the eloquent champions and conservators of Gospel truth from pulpits and platforms; but I also thank Him for the worn-out invalids, at whose feet so many of us have sat with profit—those aged men and women of God who have been confined to their bedrooms, and who have preached patience and resignation to a whole household, and sometimes a whole village. and whose departure, when it came, in all the beautiful

quietness of a godly submission, was a departure of holy triumph. In the first of these lectures,* I endeavoured to shew in the contrast between the translation of Elijah and the lingering illness of Elisha, that "harder deeds," as Henry Melvil has expressed it, and it may be deeds of more extensive usefulness, "are required from him who lingers on the couch than from many a leader in the highest and most laborious of Christian undertakings;" and the presence of this royal penitent after all his sins, reveals the immense circle of influence in the centre of which Elisha lay a few hours before his dissolution, and preached by his very surroundings to a king. Say not, then, there is no sphere of ministry in the sick-room; no sphere of usefulness opened up by a sick-bed. Why many of God's people have never been so useful as just then. There is nothing finer in all the life of the Rev. Dr. James Hamilton, of Regent Square, London—one of "the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof," in the memory of our own church—nothing more tender or touching in that charming biography by his friend, William Arnot, than the account of his last illness; and I do not wonder that a popular novelist has made the sick-room of that man of God (whom he terms Dr. Dulcis) one of the most striking chapters in a novel, startling the sceptical Lord, its hero, with the scene where the dying Christian minister, with his sweetest of smiles, sings:

"Oh! I am my Beloved's,
And my Beloved's mine:
He brings a poor vile sinner
Into His House of Wine."

I am devoutly thankful that in the pages of "Lord Bantam"—intended to represent the late Viscount Amberley and the free-thinking school of which he was the leader—our English aristocracy received such a picture of the death-bed of a good man. And of how many recent biographies the same thing might be said, illustrating the ministry of suffering, and how that can contribute to the glory of God and the welfare of man? Dr. Guthrie, at St Leonard's, as he lay and waited God's will, while the earthly house of his tabernacle was taken down pin by pin—Dr. Norman McLeod, as he took his wife's hand and said: "Oh! how good and how merciful our God has been to me, and how He has put up all these years with my rubbish"—the "rubbish" by which he converted hundreds of the working men of the Barony—the rescued men who are subscribing their shillings and half-crowns to build him a statue in front of his old church. It is no exaggeration to say that one of the most lastingly useful parts of the lives of these two noble men was the few last weeks they spent in this world. What a Christian evidence it becomes, that Christianity in scenes like these can make good its claims to be a sustaining, elevating, death-conquering To take even a man of letters, I believe that religion. regarded from a standpoint regulated by eternal results, the last few days of the life of Sir Walter Scott, if rightly studied, will do more good than all his novels put together, full as they are of pure morality, and in this respect a memorable contrast to the literature of a similar kind that went before. "Lockhart, be a good man, my dear; be virtuous, be religious; be a good man; nothing will serve you but that, when you come to lie here"—and much more of a like character, that I need not quote, but closing with this: "Read me the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of John: 'In my Father's house are many mansions," with which as the accents of Divine mercy and compassion in his ear—the legacy of peace to him—the gentle Sir Walter passed away. I remember when I visited Abbotsford for the first time and wandered through that wonderful house the armoury, with all its curiosities and coats of mail, the library, with all its collection of books on balladpoetry, and clans, and witchcraft—saw the chair in which he sat, the room in which he died, the cast taken of his face after he was gone-wandered by the banks of his own silvery Tweed, and through the gardens fashioned, like everything else there, with a strange oldworld device and taste—one thing was always uppermost in my mind—the words, "Oh, Lockhart, be religious, be a good man, my dear"—the very lips of the cast seemed to be speaking them to every visitor.

It is the lesson of this very passage. The sick-chamber has its heights of Christian teaching; the sick-bed is a great pulpit; and a prophet's scroll can be on many other than a prophet's lips. God has work for His dying Elishas to do. God has prizes for His dying Elishas to win. Therefore they live. Therefore the lamp is so long in going out. The flickering light may guide some wandering Joash. It may add another jewel to an Elisha's crown. It was an idol-loving king that bent over Elisha with his own words about Elijah, words that had become traditional in Israel, and that bind together, therefore, at the king's lips and in this passage Elisha's whole ministry—" My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof."

Read the words again. Once more Elisha stands by the banks of the Jordan. He sees the chariot of fire with the wheels of flame, the horses of fire snorting flame from mouth and nostril. He sees Elijah bowing his head, conscious that his hour has come, and there as the tempest weaves itself around him, he sees him placed in the centre of the car of fire, and Elijah goes up by a whirlwind into heaven. All this King Joash recals. It was a blessed recollection for a dying prophet, a blessed light shining into the valley of the shadow, "a

blessed hope," indeed, with which to quit the world, and go up himself to meet Elijah.

Take comfort, therefore, weeping sower, your oldest, your feeblest words may be remembered. They may come back to yourself on a sick bed; they may prove a double joy, even Elisha's joy, that while he is minister to King Joash from his dying pillow, King Joash becomes minister to him, and in his own first words uttered when the mantle fell, cheers his departing spirit with the sight of Israel's king at last confessing Israel's prophet, as the mantle now falls from him, the mantle of half-a-century. Happy, dying Elisha; laying down the mantle in the presence of an earthly king, to put on a fairer robe in the presence of a heavenly. Happy Elisha; soon to cease to be a prophet, but only to begin to be a priest and a king to God even the Father for evermore. Happy dying Elisha; the tears of an earthly king falling on his head here, the crown of glory from "the King Eternal, immortal and invisible," ready for his head yonder. Happy, thrice happy Elisha; the last work of earth to lead a king into the way of righteousness, the everlasting work of Heaven, to be led himself in the way of peace for evermore.

It was not possible that the life of Elisha could close without some final striking testimony to its fidelity and constant aim. The last act of Elijah had been one of power, when he divided the Jordan with the mantle;

the last act of Elisha is also to be one of power, when his trembling hands—ere they stiffen in death—shall speed the arrow of God's deliverance of His children from the grasp of their ancient foe. The symbol was highly instructive, and is given in the narrative with graphic touch. "Take bow and arrows," says the dying prophet to the king. "Put thine hand also upon the bow." Both were done. As the royal fingers held the string, Elisha laid his hand upon the king's hand to consecrate—not by any magical imparting of power, but to show it was the solemn appointment of God—the work about to be done. "Open the window eastward," said the prophet, the direction being that of the country east of Jordan, which the Syrians, under the relentless son of Hazael, had invaded. "Shoot," said the prophet. And away through the open lattice the arrow flew from the fingers of King Joash, guided by God. It was "the arrow of the Lord's deliverance," and "the arrow of deliverance from Syria, for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek"—the modern village of Fik, six miles east of the Sea of Galilee.

One or two historical remarks may be of service here. It was an ancient custom to shoot an arrow into the country which an army intended to enter. Curtius tells us it was the universal practice of Alexander the Great. Virgil, in a well-known passage in the ninth book of the

Æneid, represents Turnus as giving the signal of attack by throwing such a dart:

"' Who first,' he cried, ' with me the foe will dare?'
Then hurled a dart, the signal of the war."

The custom of the Romans was this. The chief of the heralds went to the confines of the enemy's country, and after a variety of solemnities, said with a loud voice: "For such and such reasons, I wage war with you;" and then he threw in a spear, a javelin, or an arrow—throwing down the gauntlet, to use the expression of modern times—the custom being preserved in the very phrase, which now of course means a glove. The parties warned were allowed thirty days, and if no treaty of peace was concluded, the war was begun.

Now work like this seemed strange occupation for a chamber of death where a prophet was dying, and that prophet Elisha, the gentle Elisha, the prophet of peace. It was in reality God owning His servant before the greatest in the land: God showing King Joash the power of an old prophet with feeble arm and laboured breath, when He Himself, the Almighty, was behind. By that "Chariot of Israel"—even Elisha—God would free the chosen people from the Syrian yoke: and in the day of their emancipation, they would remember the deathbed of the faithful minister, and the prophecy of his last day upon earth.

The first part of the symbol—thus viewed—is plain enough: and King Joash, so long as Elisha's fingers were above his—"riding the bow," as the word means—satisfied the prophet, and all went well. But the prophet withdrew his hand. The king stood alone. Deliverance from Syria was promised: but whether the full and complete deliverance was to come through him, depended upon his "Take the conduct in the second part of the symbol. arrows," therefore, said the prophet again. "Smite upon the ground." The directions seemed mysterious but the meaning is this, as the original Hebrew words plainly show. The first part of the symbol was merely a shooting of the one arrow into mid-air: the second part of the symbol was for the arrow to hit, to strike, to make its mark directly on the ground, as in the target of ordinary The injunction of the narrative might be archery. paraphrased thus: "Shoot thine arrows downward to the earth, in token of the subjection, prostration, and conquest of the Syrians, which will be effected by God working together with thy faith." Now the king had a quiver full of arrows, but according to the prevalent notion, still familiar to ourselves, that what was done thrice was done perfectly—the third time being regarded as specially fortunate—the king only hit or struck the earth three times. "He smote it thrice," we read, "and stayed." Alas! it was the proof that King Joash lacked the zeal which

is tireless and perseveres. He would help three times in the deliverance of Israel from the oppression of Syria: but as this proved him unable to stand the test, Israel's true emancipator would have to come from another and a different quarter. It was even so, as we read in the twenty-fifth verse of the present chapter:—"Three times did Joash beat Ben-Hadad, the son of Hazael, and recover the cities of Israel:" but it was Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz who completed the work, and "took again out of the hand of Ben-Hadad, the cities which he had taken out of the hand of Jehoahaz, his father, by war."

Now, apart from these historical references, which are nevertheless necessary to the proper exposition of the passage, this second part of the symbol of the bow and arrows carries its own useful lessons to us all. First of all, therefore, let us not depend on the presence even of an Elisha for our religious life. So long as Elisha's hand covered the king's hand, we saw that all went well: "his bow abode in strength and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hand of the mighty God of Jacob," whose instrument he was. But when Elisha's hand was removed, when the visible support was withdrawn, when the king was called upon to act for himself in simple faith—then he gave way. Let us beware of a mere artificial religion, which depends for its life on the society

even of the best of religious men, or which is content to worship God by proxy—say in the form of a priest at the altar, by inaudible mutterings, or (even if we heard) in an unintelligible language "doing" our religion for us. Depend upon no man for the life of your soul, so that if you fail to go to auricular confession, you are unhappy so that if some penance of man's creation is unperformed, your heart is sad, and you have remorse of conscience. Learn by faith and by grace to draw the bow yourself at the command of the Lord. Who shall dare to come between us and our Father who is in Heaven? the arrow not thrice, but six times: lest like King Joash, if with a full quiver you "stay" your hand, you make the discovery you have only been injuring yourself. arrow of believing prayer, in particular, be shot by every one of us from bows that are full bent; and let no mere partial blessing be ours when God is willing to "open" all the windows of Heaven. This is the moral of the second part of the symbol of the bow and arrows: and very beautifully does the German commentator, quoted by Lange, say at this point: "Cease not to shoot arrows of love into the heart of God: so shall one arrow of deliverance after another come back to thee from the Lord, and be given to thee in the word of truth. So shalt thou smite thy spiritual foes, and tread them under foot even more completely than Joash did the Syrians.

measure of the victory depends upon the measure of the faith."

"The man of God," it is significantly stated in the narrative, was "wroth" with King Joash for his partial zeal: and in like manner every such form of practical unbelief and distrust of God, should fill us with holy indignation against ourselves. There are God's promises -"all yea and amen in Christ Jesus." There are God's invitations—as free as the wind, as full as the waves of How do we use them? Alas! we are satisfied with little, not in temporal things where contentment is virtue, but in spiritual things, where moderation, as has been quaintly and severely said, is "a crime." We only slightly wound our spiritual enemies, instead of thirsting after an entire victory. We are willing to live on a mere corner of our estate, when there remains so "much land yet to be possessed." In hungering after righteousness—in seeking to be filled with all the fulness of God—in striving to enter in at the strait gate—in labouring for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life—in fighting the good fight of faith—is it not painfully true that we smite thrice, and then we stay? Oh! this guilty relaxation —this smiting thrice only, instead of "going forward," when so much remains to be done. "Giving all diligence add to faith virtue." "He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." "The kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." May all of us be in this happy company.

In conclusion, "Elisha died and they buried him." I shall not repeat what was advanced in the first lecture * as to the contrast between the end of Elijah and the end of Elisha: the chariot of fire and the decrepitude of old age: the horses of fire, and the pains and corrodings of Nor shall I anticipate what will fall to be considered in the next lecture: the wonders wrought at Elisha's tomb: his receiving if not a miraculous departure out of life, at least a miraculous energy after death. I close with the simple practical thought. It may be given to none of us to be Elijahs or Elishas. And yet if we are earnest Christian men and women, we shall not live in vain, and we shall not die in vain. Our example may be remembered, our words, our ways, our patience, our meekness, our quiet work for Christ—to be imitated by friends, by children, by neighbours in their own day of sorrow, in their own hour of dissolution. "We may not look with Elijah," says Henry Melvil in wise and winsome words, "to escape death: we may suffer much, we may linger long; no burning rapture may characterize

^{*} See page 13.

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our going hence; but if there be patient submission to the will of the Lord, our memory may survive and be instrumental to the victories of religion. Who would complain at not being borne away in the fire of Heaven, if while in the dust he may turn others from the fire of Hell?"

Amen.

LECTURE XII.

THE BAND OF MOABITES—ELISHA'S TOMB IN ITS RESURRECTION POWER.

"One part, one little part, we dimly scan
Through the dark medium of life's feverish dream:
Yet dare arraign the whole stupendous plan,
If but one little part incongruous seem.
Nor is that part perhaps what mortals deem;
Oft from apparent ills our blessings rise.
Oh, then renounce that impious self-esteem,
That aims to trace the secrets of the skies:
For thou art but of dust: be humble and be wise."

BEATTIE.



LECTURE XII.

THE BAND OF MOABITES—ELISHA'S TOMB IN ITS RESURRECTION POWER.

II. KINGS XIII. 20-21.

"And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet."

HE text tells a story of two dead bodies. It is difficult to say which of the two is the more wonderful. The one dead body touches the other dead body, and immediately it is restored to life. Power goes forth from the

one, life is communicated to the other. Surely a dead body had never such a meaning or such a virtue before.

It has been said that there is a moment when a man's life is relived on earth; and that moment is when his

friends who have laid his remains in their last earthly resting place, turn from it and speak with each other in broken sentences about the memory of the departed. Elisha had been many years in his grave, when his memory was suddenly revived in the land of Israel, and in the outskirts of his own royal city of Samaria.

The historical narrative is very simple. In springtime, when the crops were ripening—the usual season of the year for beginning campaigns in ancient times some predatory bands from Moab were making one of their usual incursions on the lands of Israel, devastating the country and driving off the cattle, as the wild Arab tribes do to the peaceful settlers in these very regions in the present day, unless compounded with in the shape of large money payments, familiar to us all under the names of "backsheesh," and "black-mail." A funeral party from Samaria seeing one of the too familiar robber bands in the distance, and fearing for their own lives, became alarmed; and as they happened at that moment to be passing Elisha's sepulchre, they hastily deposited their burden there. To understand the narrative at this point we must remember two things. tomb of Elisha was a catacomb—a rock-cave, which could be easily opened by simply removing the stone at the entrance or mouth; and hence the words of the pilgrims of love on the morning of the resurrection— "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" According to Jewish and Eastern custom, also the dead body was enclosed in nothing but a shroud, so that it could readily come in contact with the remains of Elisha, who had also been swathed at his death in a similar manner. The moment the two bodies touched each other, the last dead body revived, and wondering, as well he might, at this extraordinary phenomenon, "the man" rose from his shroud, stood on his feet, and no doubt returned at once to his old house in Samaria.

Several reasons have been advanced why the incident of the passage took place. It has been said, Elisha's grave had been violated by this hurried and unceremonious thrusting into it of a new tenant, through fear of the robber band from Moab: and so God in the eyes of all Israel would emphatically rebuke the dishonour done to His illustrious servant. Again, it has been said the miracle was intended to shadow forth the great doctrine of a resurrection, but dimly revealed at this period to the Jewish nation—an extraordinary story like this could never be forgotten: the dead body was being taken away to its burial: it simply touched the bones of Elisha: and immediately life came back from the world of spirits. Still further, it has been said, the story is an acted parable, is intended to shew that even after a good man is dead, his influence may survive him: "He being dead yet speaketh," lives and acts and is a power among his fellow men—Elisha was dead, and yet

he had left that behind him which God could use for His own glory and the highest good of the Jewish people and the world.

Now, I have no objection whatever to these three interpretations—in fact the second and third I very much like, as I shall try to show by and by—but I humbly think the immediate point of the miracle is missed by them all. In the preceding lecture we discussed the symbol of the bow and arrows. The miracle, therefore, wrought at Elisha's grave was the Divine seal of confirmation that what God's prophet had predicted on his deathbed, would very shortly take place, viz.: the full deliverance of Israel from the yoke of Syria. Elisha died and was buried: but even in the tomb God will reproduce him to Israel in his old character of preserver, saviour, life-giver. The king and people of Israel, at that particular moment, needed their faith very much strengthened in the still unaccomplished predictions of Elisha with reference to the deliverance from Syria. The Divine pledge accordingly, memorial, remembrancer, is given in the miracle of the narrative, and the chapter closes, as will be seen, with the historical statement of the fulfilment of the prophecy—the defeat of the enemy, the recovery of the cities that had been taken, and their restoration to the kingdom of Israel. For my own part I entertain not the slightest doubt that this is the point of connection between the death of Elisha and the restoration to life of this, his departed fellow countryman. God seizes the occasion to strengthen the faith of Israel, and honour His old servant, years after he is gone, in a manner that would travel over the length and breadth of the land.

The question is very natural—in what light are we to regard this restoration of the narrative. Did this restored man return to his grave? Was he only a prisoner on parole? With one birth, had he two burials, one cradle, and two sepulchres? Or did he never die again? The only answer, of course, to these questions is this: that the restoration of the passage was a mere temporary recall from the world of spirits, like the restoration of the widow of Nain's son, Lazarus, Jairus' daughter, differing vitally in this respect from the restoration of the sleeping saints, of whom we read in connection with Our Blessed Lord's crucifixion, that "many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after His resurrection." Their rising from the dead I believe, on the other hand, to have been a resurrection once for all to life everlasting, and that having lingered upon earth, the companions of their risen Lord, during His forty days of subsequent sojourn, they ascended with Him to glory, forming His accompanying and triumphant retinue, as He passed in at the gate of Heaven, and sat down for ever at the Father's right hand.

There is yet another point we must in all honesty face. Does this narrative not justify the Roman Catholic use and veneration of relics? Not in the least, so far as I It was not the mere bones of Elisha, we all know very well, but the direct power of God acting in, and on, and through them for a special and immediate purpose, that made this dead man live. The Jewish Church did not with much labour and ceremony dig up these bones. Much less did that church encase them in gold and silver, like the bones to be seen to-day in Paris, Cologne, Aix-la-Chapelle, Treves, and elsewhere. never read of the Jewish High Priest, even in the worst and most idolatrous days of Israel, offering the bones of Elisha to the people, to kiss and make obeisance to. Because the Roman Catholic Church would have us believe that there is some mysterious virtue in the tooth of Thomas or the toe of Peter, the three scalps of the wise men from the East, at the back of the choir in Cologne Cathedral, and even the very darkness that enveloped the land of Egypt, some of which they preserve in a phial among a hundred other absurdities at Aix-la-Chapelle—however they managed to get, and keep, and put it in there—I venture to say that is no reason why I should not believe that for His own wise purposes in Israel at a critical period, God should not work a miracle of new-creating, life-giving, miraculous power at His dead prophet's grave.

People talk about the difficulties of believing in the miracles of the Bible: there is surely a rational way of explaining them (even such a miracle as the present), without adopting the ridiculous and incoherent jargon that goes to the other extreme, and by investing the dead bodies and severed limbs of good men, with extraordinary spiritual superiority, would make everything of the supernatural incredible altogether.

These bones of Elisha never wrought such a miracle again. We never read that any other dead man was ever restored to life through their instrumentality. There could be no special sanctity in a skeleton. The Holy Spirit of God did not permanently reside in Elisha's remains, so that mere physical contact with the physical object, instantly communicated mysterious and supernatural efficacy to all and sundry. Yet that is the doctrine of the Church of Rome, that if I kiss the bone of an old martyr or saint—having of course first of all paid a consideration for the privilege—I am made a better and a holier man. I am thoroughly satisfied I would be made very much worse, because I would feel my intelligence degraded, my intellect insulted, and all my views of God—the sublime God and Father of the Bible—not only changed but annihilated. that it is one thing to believe in the God of Israel, working once and for a special and temporary purpose. wonders of resurrection power at the tomb of His

servant Elisha—never repeating them and never calling on the children of Israel to fall down and worship them; and another thing altogether to believe in the veneration of the relics of the Papacy to gain favour for my soul with God. There is a posthumous influence of good men which I cherish; it is of a very different character, however, from this: and to the brief illustration of such enviable posthumous influence the remainder of this lecture will now be devoted.

Looked at in this light, therefore—posthumous influence—the passage before us is full of instruction.

In the first place, men like Elisha leave great legacies behind. The Old Testament narratives about Elisha bring out this very prominently, the great and frequently the unconscious influence he was exerting on all around The journeying prophet, as we have seen, had been the guest of the Shunammite woman. He did not know, however, the influence he was exerting by these passing visits. But the influence was there. going on. The power of that holy man of God was being secretly felt by all beneath that roof; the invisible reins of a holy life were being thrown over them; the "holy man of God" was remembered, his words, his ways. his prayers no doubt beyond all—he was wielding a subtle, mysterious, unconscious, influence for God, abiding there weeks and months after he himself was gone. This, then, was a specimen of Elisha's influence during life; and men like Elisha, still leave great legacies behind them wherever they go, and especially after they are seen no more on the earth at all. They rest from their labours, and their works not merely "shall follow," but do follow them, in ceaseless procession; their influence is still being exerted, is still going on, is still a power in the world for God and for souls.

Let us look to ourselves. Are we not the heirs of men and women like Elisha? I might speak of the great champions of civil and religious liberty in these lands, of the vines and the fig-trees under whose broad shadow we sit to-day, none daring to make us afraid: trees which they planted with their hands, and in many an undying instance watered with their blood. The mere names of Wickliffe, and Tyndal, and Latimer, and Ridley, and Knox, and Hampden, and Oliver Cromwell, are enough to suggest to us how much we all owe to the dead—to their work, to their memories, to the inspirations with which they fill our souls to "go and do likewise." And let not others less conspicuous be forgotten. Bring up the vision of the gentle mother, sending her son forth to the big world with this text for his guide: "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve;"—the vision also of that "old disciple," the father of your home, as you used to hear him engaged in secret prayer, unburdening his soul before God, and committing the care of each and all of you to Him—the vision also of that village pastor, when the almond-tree had begun to flourish on the once raven locks, and you stood arrested by that Nathanael-like simplicity, that John-like nearness to his Saviour, that Elisha-like beautiful holiness of heart and life—and see in these how large is our debt to departed worth, how much about ourselves has been moulded and in fact produced by what we saw in them, and how we in turn, in their spirit and carrying forward their work, are to leave our impress upon others, and add our stone to the cairn of influence after death.

I would remark, secondly, each of us after death must exert some influence one way or another. The miracle of the text wrought at Elisha's tomb or catacomb was just the continuance of the grace and bounty of his long and attractive life. It was so like Elisha, one is inclined to say, as if his dead body itself had been the cause of it —so like the tender domestic prophet of the quiet balcony at Shunem. Undoubtedly the miracle was characteristic, and seems an anticipation of the great life-restoring miracles of Christ Himself. Now, neither in life nor in death can any one of us hope to rival the influence of an Elisha. True, and yet each of us has his own work to do: his own niche to fill: his own lifeservice to render: and whether we wish it or no, that life-service will remain and operate for good or for evil, long years after, when like Elisha, we are lying in the silent grave.

Then how are we to be remembered? What influence are we to exercise on the generation that is to come? What mark are we to leave on our children, on the circle in which we move, on the church of Christ of which we are the members and the representatives? What shall be the record of us? It is the spirit and not surrounding circumstances that make enduring greatness.

Take the statesman. Who of us forgets the noble anticipations of Peel, that the day would come in England when the daily labourer, lifting to his lips his daily bread, sweetened by removal of restrictive imposts, would remember his name with gratitude and affection? What statesman of the present hour, amid all the conflict of party, sees not in great national measures and undertakings, the eyes of posterity upon him, and feels that he cannot shake himself free from a most salutary jealousy of what succeeding times will say? In like manner, the humblest man and woman among us will have some kind of a posthumous influence. How are we to be remembered then by our own sons and daughters?

Shall they say of us that we were kind and indulgent, that they wanted for nothing that belonged to the present life, but seldom or never heard of another—that we were most exemplary in giving them the knowledge to fit them for usefulness in this world, but shewed little or no anxiety about their being made "wise unto salvation"—that we had Bibles in our houses, but that they were

seldom read—that we had prayers in our dwellings, but only when the minister or the hour of sickness came—that everything was proper and decorous, but without real, earnest religious life—religion shewn to be a necessity, religion made attractive, religion as much a part of daily life as rising in the morning and going to bed at night, religion in one word crowning and consecrating all? That is one way of being remembered after death, but it is a posthumous influence to be dreaded and deprecated by every wise man.

And here is another way of being remembered, and proving like Elisha's bones the quickening by God's blessing of other souls and lives—the Sabbath made the happiest day in the week with the melody of Christian song and the happy seriousness of Christian hearts—the Bible story, the House of God, the simple teaching of the Sunday-school, the balm upon the spirit as the night closed in, with family prayer and thanksgivings for another Sabbath-day. The picture might be The outline will suffice—the indefinitely drawn out. holy, pure, and Christlike family life, with religion's sweetest smile and benediction. For which, I ask again, would any wise man desire to be remembered? In a few years at the longest, we shall all be matter of memory. There will be other faces in our dwellings; in our scenes of business; in the long familiar pew in the house of prayer. Oh! strange and startling transformation, that the brightest eye, and the fairest face, and the form of stoutest build in this assembly must go down like Elisha to the narrow house, where beauty and deformity, riches and poverty, are all equal in the end. What memory shall we leave behind, and what entry shall the recording angel make in God's great book concerning us all?

Men are very busy there down on our Exchange. It is a great living scene. Some day the busiest, wealthiest merchant will be seen there for the last time. He will go to his office. He will shut his cash drawer. He will close his portfolio, put on his hat and go away. He will never come back. A week, a fortnight, a month elapses, his friends ask "where is old Mr.——?" There in the newspaper. What memory has he left behind?

I would remark in the third place, as professing Christian men and women, each of us is to be solicitous to leave behind him the recollections that will please God. Let us enquire for a little into one or two of the best methods of securing such a posthumous power. And the first I mention is, a fixed and definite religious faith. This must be the foundation. This is and must ever remain the secret of all true influence whether in life or in death or after death. None of us has any force about him so full of power as the force of his personal religion. It may have cost you a good deal. If your arm gets dislocated, it is a serious matter to get it back again into

its socket. But, then, after the pain comes health, and peace, and your arm is fit again for work. So with our disordered and dislocated natures. Their "setting," so to speak, may have caused us much sorrow and anguish: but the final result is peace and power; the new life seeks a robust religion that shall make it valiant and valorous for God. This is the Bible's idea of religion; a religion that is to lead you and me to strike out for God, when once, like David, our own heart is "fixed," and our faith settled on the One Foundation.

Again, I would say, beginning religion early in life is a great help to securing religious power, and leaving memories behind us that will influence others for good. Those who have done most for Christ, were brought to Christ young. "I thank Thee, O God," said Beza, "for many things; but I especially thank Thee that I was led to give myself to the Saviour at the age of sixteen." There is always danger in waiting for the last train. Wise men allow themselves a little margin. Wait till the last minute and perhaps you will lose the train altogether. We may learn the lesson in regard to the great "line" that stretches between earth and heaven. Let no one say he can start any time. Start now. Do not calculate on possibilities. Young souls are the most valuable souls at least a soul that comes late to Christ has not the same opportunity of serving Christ, is not worth so much to the world, cannot help forward the world's salvation so effectively as if thirty years before there had been the marriage union consummated that made Christ and that soul one.

Very helpful also in the direction of sound Christian influence both now and long after we are gone, I believe the cultivation of wise Christian companionships to be. Remark in the text the dead body of the man who was about to be buried did not come into contact with Ahab, Jehu, or Jehoram; life did not come to the dead body through any such channel. No, it was contact with Elisha God blessed—the remains of the man of God; and so I apply the incident to what I have termed the cultivation of wise Christian companionships, and I am sure I am only following the spirit of the passage when I suggest still further—seeking in Christian literature, in the "remains," so to speak, of manly and Christ-consecrated intellects, the true counsellors to form our character and shape our lives.

"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise." We are all the debtors of Christian literature, and Christian old age. And if we are in sympathy with none who are not in sympathy with God, we have put ourselves in a safe position. No other position, however, is safe. The choice of companions and counsellors is not a slight choice. Carelessness there may be ruin, and has often been. When the city of Moscow was burning, during the invasion of the first Napoleon, a party was

dancing in the palace, over a gunpowder magazine. On came the flames and on, while the music played, and the feet bounded, and the laughter rang. There was a sudden explosion, and then came death and eternity. That was the result of simple carelessness—ruin through simple carelessness. Beware, my younger friends especially, of the companionships of dissipation, infidelity, and sin, lest amid the lights and the gaiety, the explosion come, and you drop into the awful desolation.

Once again, let me say, I do not know a better way to promote the healthy character and influence of our own souls, than just to go away, and in the strength of God, do what we can to convert some other soul. I fear it is true of us all, that we keep our religion too much indoors. Away out with it then in the Master's service. One of the most favourite words in the Bible is the word "Come." Why, then, is it not much more frequently on our lips as Christ's believing followers? It occurs no fewer than 642 times in the Bible. If so, why do not we Christian men and women use it oftener? "Come; for all things are now ready." "Come to the "Come to the marriage." "Come to the supper." waters." "The Spirit and the bride say, Come." Ring out the word then, "COME." "Why will ye die?"

A year or two ago, as we all remember, two hundred men were buried in the Hartley Colliery. The

Queen telegraphed from Windsor: "Is there any hope for the men?" The sad, the awful answer was returned: "No hope." No hope for these unfortunate men buried in the darkness and horrors of that coal-mine; but there is hope for all men buried in the darkness of sin: yes, "Hope for all." Send the words along, then, thrilling through the world—"Hope for all. Not one soul need perish. God never puts any man in perdition; he puts himself there. No doubt there is a place of woe, but who is it that has made for us every possibility of escaping from it? If I rush deliberately into a burning house, who is to blame if I perish in the conflagration? In like manner here is our message to souls: "a great salvation." all preach it. The man who is the means of converting most souls will exert, like Elisha, the widest influence while he lives and when he is dead. "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

In conclusion, virtue went out of the very bones of Elisha. It cannot be true, therefore, though we often say it, that when a man dies, "There is an end of him." It is not the end of him, even when you see the turf rolled over his head, and go back to the silent and empty home. It cannot be the end of him. The spiritual lesson of Elisha's tomb, is to seek, when this brief life

is finished, to be still a power for good. That prospect God places before us all, if we use life as He intends it should be used. Are we ready? Our work is ready. Go and seek some soul. I have read that the deeper the water, the larger the pearl. Even so, take this comfort with you, worker for Christ-out of the greatest depths, ay, and charnel-houses of sin, God often gathers up His brightest jewels. Paul was a persecutor. Bunyan tells us he was a blasphemer. John Newton was an infidel. Yet God's grace went down after them, plunging down to the very depths, and found them, and saved them, and brought them up to light, and day, and joy, and peace. These are the pearls that form the crown jewels of Christ. Surely, then, it is a high and holy ambition to seek to wield an influence for God, and in any way like Elisha's dead body, to be used by God, to quicken a new life in some other cold and dead soul. Be this ambition, more than ever ours. Amen.

CONCLUSION.

ELISHA PREFIGURING CHRIST.

"To the men of every land in every age, Jesus has been proclaiming what the great ends are of His mission to this earth. This is the year of our Lord, the long year of Christ that takes in all the centuries down to His second coming, the year in every day and every hour of which our Heavenly Father waits, to forgive, receive, accept all contrite ones who come to Him. There is a spiritual blindness which Jesus only can remove, a spiritual imprisonment from which He only can release, a deadly spiritual malady eating in upon our heart which He alone can heal."

REV. DR. HANNA.



CONCLUSION.

ELISHA PREFIGURING CHRIST.

ACTS III. 19-25.

"For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets." &c.

HE present lecture will close the series on "ELISHA THE PROPHET OF PEACE," and is to be regarded as a kind of summary or summing up. The text is chosen from the sermon of Peter, at the Beautiful Gate of the

Temple, one of those packed and unanswerable discourses in which the eloquent Apostle shewed the harmony of New Testament narrative with Old Testament prediction concerning Christ, "the testimony of Jesus being the spirit of prophecy," and to Him all the prophets being witness-bearers. The special point now to be considered,

is Elisha prefiguring Christ, the son of Shaphat, the gentle prophet of Israel, being the emblem in his ministry in the land of Palestine 900 years before Christ, of the infinitely greater Prophet, who was yet to arise, the son of Joseph, the gentle Jesus, the Son of God.

We have the best authority for the statement that Elijah was the Old Testament type of John the Baptist. "He shall go before Him," said the angel speaking to Zacharias, the father of John, "in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just: to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Elijah was the forerunner, the reformer, the preacher of repentance to Ahab and the nation. Baal's prophets had the supremacy—the true prophets and people to the number of seven thousand were hidden in the caves. Elijah reversed this state of things, reinstated the prophets of God, and then, his mission fulfilled, he was withdrawn.

Now, if Elijah was the Old Testament type of John the Baptist, shall we err if we regard Elisha as one of the Old Testament types of Christ? I do not wish to push the doctrine of types too far. In some respects, if we overstrain it, even the Bible parallel of Elijah and John the Baptist would fail, because John, as we are expressly told, "did no miracle," while Elijah raised the dead; John met with a violent death—Elijah was translated. It must also be admitted that we have no distinct

authority in the case of Elisha for saying, that he was, or was intended to be, a type of Christ. The Bible is simply silent on the subject. What then? No one doubts that Isaac, especially in the scene on Mount Moriah—" Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"—was a type of Christ, and yet we cannot point to the passage that says so in so many plain and decided words. Joseph, also, in many senses, was a type of Christ—"Go unto Joseph," said Pharaoh to the famished people, "what he saith to you, do." "Go unto Jesus," says God, transfiguring the words, and yet we cannot give the precise passage for the correspondence. We must allow a margin, therefore, for the parallelisms, for it would be very arbitrary to say that there are none such between the Old Testament and the New, and particularly in relation to Christ, except those that are literally and definitely laid down. What are given, I believe, are simply specimens; specimens that furnish the clue, so that with this clue in our hands, we are at perfect liberty, as in the case of Elisha, to go and search for others.

I. In the facts and incidents of his early history we may find Elisha prefiguring Christ. He came from Jordan, gifted by the hand of Elijah with the power of the Spirit; and surely there is some resemblance here between him and our Blessed Lord, baptised by John in the same river of Jordan, when the Holy Spirit like a

dove abode upon Him. Nor can I forget the eminently religious home in which Elisha was brought up at Abelmeholah, "the meadow of the dance,"—reminding me of another home in Nazareth, where even a child understood what it was to be about "His Father's business." Is there nothing, also, in the fact that Elisha was called from the plough to be a prophet, and that up to the period when he began His public ministry, the Master, with the sweat standing in bead-drops on His lofty brow, stooped low and worked hard at a carpenter's bench:

"We need not bid for cloistered cell Our neighbour and our work farewell; Nor strive to wind ourselves too high For sinful man beneath the sky."

Nay, I have not the slightest doubt that the expressive image of the Master—" putting the hand to the plough"—was suggested to His mind by this very story of Elisha.* "Lord," said the wavering disciple, "I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house." Elisha might return with safety; the wavering disciple, however, might not. In the case of Elisha, all the influence of home would only be in favour of his immediate acceptance of the Divine

^{*} See "Elijah, the Desert Prophet," by the present Author, page 185,

call; in the case of the wavering disciple, the probability was this, that if he had mingled again among his earthly relations, their entreaties would have estranged him from Christ altogether. "Therefore, Jesus said unto him, No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

II. In close connexion and intercourse with matters of this world, we may find Elisha prefiguring Christ. Like John the Baptist, Elijah to a large extent lived out of the world—away from and above it, in stern sublimity. Elisha, on the other hand, as we have seen all through the course of these lectures, was a citizen of the world, and mingled—as we would say in present day language—in all the great national and political movements and events of his time. In like manner, one of the chief complaints against the Divine Author of Christianity was this: His publicity,-"The Son of man came eating and drinking" -and His apparent insurrection against constituted authority. The first was true, for "He could not be hid," the second was false, for His kingdom was not of this world, else would His servants fight. The Elijah-like type of character—the hermit, the recluse, the solitary was not reproduced in Jesus Christ. Such a type of character, in fact, was essentially unfitted for a religion that was to conquer the world. Christianity was to be a religion for common life. It was to meet the merchant on the Exchange, and go with the mariner on every sea.

The old exclusiveness of Judaism was for ever at an end. "This man receiveth sinners." The taunt is now the glory of the faith of Christendom. There is simply nothing in this world which Christianity is not to penetrate and pervade; in the world like its Founder, though not of it. High and low, Christ mingled with them all: the wife of Herod's steward was one of His ministering women, and He had words of infinite compassion even for her, who was society's outcast: "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more." Monastic orders, conventual establishments, oratories and the like—all are foreign to the genius, ideal, and first principles of the Gospel, a going back in fact, to the mere "beggarly elements," when what the world needs is "the unsearchable riches of Christ," which Christian men and women are bound to offer, even as they have received them,—"Without money and without price."

III. In his intimate communion with the other world, we find another important and apt-to-be-forgotten element in Elisha prefiguring Christ. Elijah and John the Baptist had little or nothing of this. True, Elijah was fed by the ravens, and miraculously sustained by an angel under the juniper tree; yet he had no such revelations and glimpses of the unseen world—beyond "the still small voice"—as were vouchsafed to Elisha. "And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw: and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round

about Elisha." "I, even I only, am left," was the wail of Elijah: to Elisha, on the other hand, was given in a manner the most extraordinary, the anticipation by hundreds of years of the great Christian doctrine of the Communion of Saints. "Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the first born which are written in Heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect."

Of this Elisha was the type. That vision which he besought God to give for a moment to his terrified attendant, when the hosts of the Syrians were round his dwelling, he in faith or by inspiration enjoyed continually. He prayed and said: "Lord, I pray Thee open his eyes, that he may see." Elijah was the type of "the mount that burned with fire, the blackness, the darkness, the tempest, the sound of the trumpet, and the voice of words:" Elisha was the type of the mountain of Zion, sentinelled by the body-guard of Heaven in the interests of the humblest believer. "Ye are come unto Mount Zion." This is our privilege. We dwell under the shadow of an innumerable company of angels. We are baptized into the fellowship of the spirits of the perfected just. We are allotted the guardianship of cherubim and seraphim. We live in the very presence and court of God Himself.

Let no one sneer at this. "We are still under a supernatural dispensation," says John Henry Newman in a beautiful passage, "though many do not realize it; and did they realize it, they would doubtless have more sensible proofs given them of it. God asks of us first, faith, and then He vouchsafes to give us sight. Did we believe, as we ought, that we were under His immediate governance, He would reward us by tokens of such a privilege which we know not of at present. God's arm is not shortened, though man does not believe. He does His wonders in spite of us. Angels are among us, and they do wonders for the believing which the world knows nothing about. Only believe, and all things are ours—we shall have clear and deeply-seated convictions on our minds of the reality of the invisible world, though we cannot communicate them to others, or explain how we come to have them ourselves."

These again, I repeat, are the privileges of the New Testament Church—

"All saints, the living and the dead
But one Communion make;
All join in Christ, their Living Head
And of His grace partake."

"Your life is hid with Christ in God," and no eye sees or can ever see, such high spiritual wonders, as the eye of simple, true, and earnest faith.

Now, pursuing the parallel here it is totally unne-

cessary to refer to the communion with the unseen world, and especially with His Heavenly Father, constantly enjoyed by our Blessed Lord. Even on the earth, He lived in Heaven. Angels ministered to Him in the desert, in Gethsemane, even in His tomb. The hillsides of Galilee were the witnesses and shrines of his lonely vigils, as in the prayers of the night, He strengthened Himself with secret power for the labours of the day. Infinitely more than Elisha ever could have possessed, He had visions of unseen realities constantly before Him, save when the great darkness came down and the great cry went up: "My God, my God, why hast Thou. forsaken me?" Through that darkness we have come to the light; and through that awful, unutterable solitariness of the Cross, we are brought into communion with the Living God.

IV. In what I shall term the discerning of spirits, and the reading of the thoughts and intents of the heart, we have another line of parallel in Elisha prefiguring Christ. "Went not mine heart with thee," said the prophet to Gehazi, "when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee?" And Gehazi, as we saw, was unmasked on the spot. When Jehoram, at the siege of Samaria, sent the executioner to take the prophet's life, "See ye," said the man of God, "how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head: shut the door and hold him fast at the door: is not the sound of his master's feet

behind him?" Even in Syria the prophet's gift in this respect was known, and a courtier of Ben-Hadad could say, "Elisha the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bed-chamber." And to be convinced that such prescience, foreknowledge, "second sight"—to employ the misapplication of modern days—was a permanent endowment, and that ignorance was unusual, we have only to remember the scene at Carmel, when the Shunammite woman, driven by the urgency of a mother's love, sought out the prophet on the hill: "Her soul is vexed within her," said the prophet, "and the Lord hath hid it from me and hath not told me."

Now how innumerable are the illustrations in the life of Christ of Divine prescience and discerning of spirits, as furnished in the four Gospels, I need not stay to tell. "He knew what was in man." And it is by bringing things to the Master's test that we, as by a new and subtle sense, can detect insidious unbelief, and transmit the faith of the Gospel pure and inviolate, as the beloved disciple assures us in a passage which is full of much solemn truth—although the Roman Catholic Church has sadly tortured and twisted it in the direction of the dogma of infallibility—"The anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you; and ye need not that any man teach you, but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it

hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him." The one Infallibility in the universe is in Christ, because Christ is God.

There is another side to this thought. If Christ knows what is in man, He is just the Saviour for us, "the sympathising Jesus." There are hundreds of thousands in this land, of whose troubles, with all her queenly and maternal sympathy, the sovereign of these realms can never know. But Christ, who "knows what is in man," knows this among the rest. The great nerve-centre—our deepest spiritual sensations all thrill to Him. What touches us, touches Christ: for, "We have not an High Priest" who is not "touched with a feeling of our infirmities;" "He keepeth all His people as the apple of the eye." This suggests another point.

V. In moral magnetism of character we see Elisha—in an infinitely lower, I admit, but still a sufficiently important and admissible sense—in his work and ministry prefiguring Christ.

The attractiveness of Elisha's character we have had ample occasion during these lectures to see. The story of the Shunammite woman alone is sufficient to make "the holy man of God" for ever welcome and winsome to our hearts. In like manner remember the magnetism of Christ, in drawing Peter from his fishing-boat, and Matthew from the custom-house at Capernaum, and making

even Zaccheus, the extortioner, disgorge his ill-gotten gain. I think our great painters have seldom been less successful than in painting pictures of Christ. I have seen scores of them; but the face has either been too effeminate, or too colourless and uncharacteristic and sometimes even too despotic—of all things in the world—to satisfy the portrait of the Bible, or the unpainted portrait of the heart. The best life of Christ is in the four Gospels, and the best pictures of Christ are there also.

If you try, however, to recollect for a moment who and * what Christ was in Galilee nineteen centuries ago, you will be more impressed than ever with the power of His invisible influence and moral majesty. Look in at that workshop outside of which you see the olive and the cedar that have fallen to His axe. There is nothing there apparently but a carpenter, a handicraftsman, working for his daily bread. No son of merchant prince is there. No scholar of the schools goes out with that young man when He stands up in the synagogue and says: "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." "that Galilean peasant," to adopt the sneer of Voltaire, has changed the face of the world; and apart from the truths He taught and the Divine revelation He gave to men, His character itself, is especially—as compared with the arch-impostor Mohammed—one of the

strongest direct evidences of the truth of the Christian religion.

VI. There is much in Elisha's miracles to justify the parallel before us, of Elisha prefiguring Christ.

I have dwelt so prominently, in the course of these lectures, upon the eminently beneficent character of the miracles wrought by Elisha, and their similarity in many instances to those of the four Gospels, that I need not recapitulate what has already been advanced. The' miracle of the twenty barley loaves, and the multiplying of the widow's pot of oil, remind us vividly of Him who took five barley loaves and two small fishes in His hands, and with these fed five thousand men, besides women and children. The cleansing of Naaman alone contains the very sum and substance of the Gospel plan of salvation. "Then went he down, according to the saying of the man of God." A great struggle for the humbled man, but the child spirit rises to the ascendant; the better nature and the better resolve are uppermost, and so faith triumphs. That old river Jordan throughout the whole of that scene with Naaman seems to me to be murmuring these words: "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin." That old story is still a living Epistle of the power of God and the grace of salvation to every one that believeth. previous sin, no previous erroneously religious views,

can ever disqualify from finding peace in Christ, if it only be sought in the right way. And thus Elisha, with his "Wash and be clean," will be a great preacher of Christianity to the end of time. The healing waters of Israel are now the healing waters for the world; alas! for those who refuse to bathe in them, and to find that all they have lost has only been the leprosy of a fallen nature, and what they have gained is a new life. Nay, in that cleansing of Naaman Elisha anticipated the time when the door into God's mercy would be a wide as well as an open door; when Syrian as well as Jew, the alien as well as the child of the covenant, would be free to enter in and take freely of what had been provided for the necessities of the world. To-day, thank God, these healing waters are flowing through the Hindoo jungle, the American prairie, the palm-groves of Brazil, ay, and unfrozen, by the shores of Greenland and Labrador. We are all the debtors of Elisha, for we are all the heirs of the inheritance he has bequeathed us, in miracles which proclaimed that the Bread of Life, and the Water of Life, in all their blessed amplitude, would soon be the possession of the world.

In conclusion, let these Sabbath morning studies on Elisha teach us this:

That work done for God is the best work, and will yield us most satisfaction in our last hours.

That the time to do God's work is to do it now, like Elisha, when he left his family circle and comfortable home at the Divine call, to become a prophet—a great honour, a great danger too.

That our religion if it is to be worth anything must be a force—felt everywhere, robust and brawny, making its mark for Christ, not afraid even of crossing people's prejudices if the result will be their everlasting gain. In one word let us learn

What one man may do when used by God. What a wonderful instrument is the human hand! What work its bones, and muscles, and joints can accomplish, when knit together and used by any one of us. That hand what can it not do? It constructed the Pyramids; it holds the ocean steamer to its path in the sea. the Parthenon; it feels through one of its fingers the pulse of that sick and delicate child. It has grasped the sword and decided the destinies of nations; it strikes the lyre, the harp, the keys of the noble instrument that makes music for all time. It writes, and carves, and builds. It levels the forests, and trains the flowers on the carpet of the earth. It tells its love without a voice; and there is a meaning in its grasp which no voice could ever utter. A touch of that hand. and the mightiest machinery is still as the sleeping babe, or thunders through the land, with fire and water yoked to its chariot wheels. Most wonderful human

hand—a few fingers directed by the mind and will of man. Take that same hand, take that same mind and will of man, and put both into the hand of God: what may an Elijah, an Elisha, not do for Him? One man with God in him and God with him has been justly described as "multitudinous above all human majorities." He will, he must succeed; for he is a medium for the might of God—that God who is Omnipotence. "One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the Lord your God, He it is that fighteth for you, as He hath promised you." "A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation."

Amen.



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